THE SUPERPOWERS IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT, 1970-1973

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Abraham S. Becker

"Detente is, or ought to be, the essence of good neighborliness ..." Alec Douglas-Home (New York Times, December 2, 1973)

I. INTRODUCTION

This essay, completed in December 1973, undertakes to examine the interactions of the United States and the USSR in the Middle East arena from 1970. Thus, the period treated begins with the heating up of the War of Attrition and ends with the explosion of the Yom Kippur-Ramadan War. The focus of interest is on the changing nature of Soviet involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the pattern of U.S. reaction thereto.

Few elements of the Middle Eastern conflict have seemed to alter as often and as rapidly as that of the Soviet involvement. It broadened and deepened after the Six Day War, and at the height of the War of Attrition on the Suez Canal front, in the spring of 1970, 15,000 - 20,000 Soviet troops were supporting a direct Soviet role in the defense of Egyptian airspace. Thus, the expulsion of Soviet military personnel from Egypt in July 1972 appeared as a particularly stunning alteration in the regional picture. To many in and outside the region, that event signified reduced Soviet involvement in the conflict generally and diminished probability of the renewal of full-scale war. In the second week of October 1973, the illusion was shattered. The third renewal of full-scale Arab-Israeli war saw the Soviet Union exhorting other Arab states to come to the aid of their brother combatants and mounting an intensive military airlift to Egypt and Syria during the fighting. Moscow resisted a U.S. effort to bring about a cease-fire until the tide turned against the Arabs and appeared to threaten unilateral military intervention to preserve the integrity of an Egyptian army corps isolated on the East Bank of the Canal.

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To those who had begun to believe in the final demise of the cold war after the Moscow and Washington summit meetings in 1972 and 1973, Soviet behavior in October 1973 came as a shock. Doubts of the continued viability of the Soviet-American detente were widespread, and the Nixon Administration was pressed on numerous occasions to clarify its understanding of the state of relations with the USSR. Some say that "detente" has been confused with "entente" in the public mind. Others insist that it is not just in the public mind that the confusion has occurred. The Nixon Administration has asserted that it will not be satisfied with "selective detente", but it is not entirely clear whether it believes the events of October fall under that heading. This paper will argue that if the pattern of Soviet-American relations in the Middle East in earlier years is defined as "detente", then the term also characterizes superpower interactions during October 1973.

This is the basic message of the paper. The actions of Moscow (and of Washington, too) in the fall of 1973 are not inconsistent with behavior patterns in previous crises since the Six Day War; indeed, the October War events confirm the generalizations derived from examination of the record of superpower interaction in the last three or four years. To this observer rethinking the state of great power involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, it seems striking how much we still stand, as 1973 draws to a close, in the shadow of the events of 1970; how significant the events of that drama-filled year were in illuminating relationships among the major protagonists.

Therefore, the point of departure of the paper is a review of some highlights of the approximately 14-month period from December 1969 to February 1971, which for brevity's sake is designated simply, "1970". The review sets the stage for discussion of the major issues of the essay, the evolving rules of Soviet-American military interaction and the efforts of both superpowers to avoid

mutual military confrontation. A concluding section considers prospects in the Middle East after the October War.

In taking the indicated approach, this paper ignores or mentions only briefly some notable topics. This refers in particular to the Two and Four-Power negotiations on the Middle East in 1969-70 and to the internal components of both U.S. and Soviet policy in the region. The first omission is probably of small consequence but the latter set of issues cannot be easily dismissed. The writer is inclined to the view that the economic dimension of Soviet Middle Eastern policy in this period is a negligible factor, that neither the costs of the Soviet regional operation[1] nor the well-known difficulties of the Soviet domestic economy have played a significant role in shaping Soviet Middle East policy.[2] However, the absence of any discussion of Soviet domestic political considerations -- or of the American counterparts too -- and their impact on foreign policy is undoubtedly a limitation of the paper. The writer can only point to other limitations -- of space, time, and his own talent -- that compel him to refrain from attempting to repair the gap.

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[1] See Gur Ofer, "The Economic Burden of Soviet Involvement in the Middle East", Soviet Studies 24:3 (January 1973), pp. 329-347. Also J.R. Carter, The Net Cost of Soviet Foreign Aid, Praeger, 1971.

[2] On the role of oil in Soviet policy, see A.S. Becker, "Oil and the Persian Gulf in Soviet Policy in the 1970s", in Michel Confino and Shimon Shamir, eds., The USSR and the Middle East, Israel Universities Press, 1973.

II. THE LONG SHADOW OF 1970

As 1969 drew to a close, Nasser's intermittent War of Attrition in the Suez Canal had been in progress for nine months. A new American administration, concerned that the Middle Eastern powder keg might be ignited momentarily, made public in December a set of proposals for settlement of the conflict, the so-called Rogers Plan, that called for virtually complete Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the West Bank. The proposals were met by a storm of denunciation in Israel and little overt support in the Arab world. Moreover, they were soon overwhelmed by a rapid escalation of Soviet involvement.

January 1970 saw the inauguration of Israeli air strikes into the heart of Egypt in response to Egyptian attacks along the Canal. Nasser appealed to Moscow for help and in February and March Soviet technicians set up a surface-to-air missile system in the Nile valley. In mid-April, Soviet pilots began flying covering air patrol over the same region. Perhaps not without connection, the Soviet Navy was engaging in what the daily newspaper of the Ministry of Defense called "the largest maneuvers in military history", executed simultaneously in the Pacific, Atlantic, Baltic, and Mediterranean.[1] In the late spring and early summer, the Soviets and the Egyptians attempted to move the line of air defense against Israeli attack up to the Canal borders, but they were met by intensified Israeli counter-strikes that largely succeeded in frustrating their efforts. The military struggle in the early summer of 1970 was capped by the direct engagement of Soviet and Israeli air forces, in which the latter shot down four MIG-21s piloted by Soviet officers.

Earlier, Cairo and Jerusalem had accepted the American initiative for a cease fire and a return to negotiations through the UN mediator, Gunnar Jarring. On the night the cease fire went into effect,

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[1] Krasnaia zvezda, May 12, 1970.

August 7-8, the Egyptians and the Soviets began to move the SAM line to the banks of the canal, in violation of the stand-still agreement, which formed an integral part of the cease fire. For a while Washington pooh-poohed Jerusalem's protests, but even when the missile movements were confirmed by aerial photography, the State Department was unable to secure Egyptian and Soviet acknowledgment or "rectification" of the violations.

In September civil war broke out between the fedayeen and Hussein's army in Jordan. Syrian armed forces crossed the Jordanian border, an action that threatened to trigger both Israeli and great power involvement. The Syrian intervention was turned back by the efforts of the Jordanian armed forces themselves, and the danger of a renewal of Middle East war with big power involvement was averted, but not before Jerusalem and Washington had both uttered threatening noises. The same month brought the death of Nasser, the most powerful and charismatic figure that the Arab anti-Israel forces were able to muster.

Because of the violations of the stand-still agreement and in the absence of "rectification" of the SAM movements, Jerusalem refused to return to the Jarring negotiations. American efforts to compensate Israel for the deterioration in the tactical situation and to revive the Jarring talks brought about a significant reequipment and modernization of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). But when in February 1971, Jarring suggested that both sides undertake in advance of negotiations specific treaty commitments, including an Israeli pledge to withdraw from all Arab territories, Jerusalem refused and the Jarring talks broke down.

The most readily apparent result of the events of 1970 seemed to be a military stalemate between Egypt and Israel. Both sides welcomed the American initiative bringing about a cease fire on the Suez Canal. In the year since Nasser had proclaimed the War of Attrition,

the Israelis had sustained large and worrisome losses. Egyptian losses were considerably greater. Moreover, the campaign seemed to be heading for a dead end, for the Israel Air Force was preventing the extension of the Egyptian SAM lines to the Canal zone and therefore remained free to pound Egyptian artillery positions from the air.[1]

With the coming into effect of the cease fire, the Israeli effort was nullified. Thus was established the most formidable air defense system outside Eastern Europe and the USSR (not excluding North Vietnam), first in the Nile Valley and around the Aswan Dam, then on the West Bank of the Canal. The effort was intended in the first instance to deny the IDF the option of relatively low-cost counters to major Egyptian initiatives -- for example, the aerial bombardment in response to the Egyptian army's concentrated artillery fire directed at the Bar-Lev line. Moving the missile line to the Canal also unfurled an umbrella covering a good part of the East Bank to protect a future Egyptian crossing in force.

To some extent, the balance was redressed by the American reequipment of the IDF, which focused on electronics and airborne ground attack systems. Moreover, under the cover of the cease fire, the IDF was busy on its side of the Canal as well, and undoubtedly the Bar-Lev line was made much less vulnerable to sustained artillery barrages than in 1969-70. Prolongation of the cease fire enabled both sides to further consolidate and improve their ground positions on either side of the Suez barrier.

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[1] According to Hassanein Heykal, Nasser accepted the cease fire proposal because, among other reasons, "he had found out that the rate of military escalation on the Egyptian front required a pause to prepare for a new kind of war - electronic war" (al-Ahram, December 3, 1970; citations in this paper from the Arab press and from Soviet broadcasts, unless otherwise indicated, are from Foreign Broadcast Information Service translations). Heykal discusses at length three other reasons for Nasser's decision -- his desire for a political solution, his fear of the collapse of the "eastern front", and the psychological damage caused by the escalation of Soviet military involvement -- but he says nothing more about the need "to prepare for a new kind of war".

The upshot seemed to be that the Egyptians would find the problem of a cross-canal attack more formidable than ever and the Israelis would face the difficult task of "solving" the Canal's West Bank air defense system. Presumably because Cairo's subjective valuation of this balance of uncertainties was bleak, the cease fire remained in de facto operation even after President Sadat refused to renew it formally. To keep the cease fire in force, the Israelis, for their part, indicated their willingness during 1971-72 at least to discuss an interim agreement that required their withdrawal from the shelter of the Bar-Lev line.

But the balance of forces drawn in 1970 contained another major element whose impact only gradually became manifest. The escalation of Soviet military involvement in the spring of 1970, culminating in the Soviet-Israeli dog fights over the Canal, seemed to portend direct Soviet participation in any renewal of full scale war between Israel and Egypt. The likelihood seemed particularly great if such a fourth round of Arab-Israeli war threatened another Egyptian, and therefore also Soviet, humiliation. The limits of Soviet direct military engagement and the extent of possible American reaction became the burning issues of the day.[1]

On this critical question of the rules of the game of Soviet-American involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the year 1970 brought some significant but not immediately appreciated lessons. At the beginning of the year, the Israeli deep penetration raids threatened the collapse not only of the Nasser-initiated War of Attrition but of the entire Egyptian war effort and perhaps also of the regime itself. The Soviet Union obviously had to come to the aid of its client in some way. A token response could have been useless

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[1] In the spring of 1970, Israel's Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, gave the first subject considerable public attention. See his articles in Maariv, April 10 and in Bamahaneh, April 14, 1970.

in dangerous circumstances. A more effective response threatened to awaken U.S. fears and invite U.S. actions that would bring closer the danger that both superpowers had tried hard to avoid -- their military confrontation in the region. In Moscow it might have been feared that the introduction of extensive Soviet forces on Egyptian soil could trigger exactly that kind of reaction. Thus, when it undertook to establish the air defense system manned by its own forces in the Nile valley, the Kremlin was taking a step which it very likely viewed as substantially risky. This should have applied a fortiori to the introduction of Soviet pilots flying MIG fighter patrols, but the American response to the first move had been weak. Moreover, Washington continued to withhold agreement to sell Israel more F-4s, hoping to secure Soviet cooperation in controlling arms supply to the region.

Encouraged by the American passivity in the face of the initial Soviet steps in February and March, Moscow felt emboldened to proceed to the second stage of sending Soviet pilots on combat air patrol in the Egyptian interior. Before the cease fire came into effect, Soviet pilots ventured to engage Israeli fighters over the canal. Finally, confident in its estimate of Washington's reaction, the Kremlin dared to help break the standstill agreement and move the air defense system to the edge of the Canal.

In August 1970 Moscow might have been justified in drawing the conclusion that the American resolve to contain Soviet penetration had softened considerably over the years. Picture the response of an American policymaker a decade before to a Soviet attempt to introduce 10,000 military personnel into Egypt along with advanced jet fighters and SAMS, at the same time as a growing Soviet Mediterranean fleet was establishing a major quasi-base in Alexandria. If such a chain of events in 1970 failed to elicit a strong American response, perhaps it was ascribed in Moscow to the impact of the Vietnam experience. But it probably also appeared to the Kremlin that the graduated process of the growth of Soviet forces in the Middle East had played a major role in helping to alter Washington's perception of that growth. The cumulative results would surely have been unacceptable as a prospect

ten years ago -- possibly even in the current period, had they taken place all at once. But perhaps the U.S. had not perceived the discrete turning points along the way toward the achievement of the end result. The policy of probing is, of course, a familiar feature of Soviet behavior in many parts of the world where the pursuit of Soviet interests encounters powerful opposition. The events of the first half of 1970 may have reinforced the view of Soviet decisionmakers on the value of incrementalism as a tactic of penetration in a contested area, given its seeming paralytic effect on U.S. policy.

However, the following month brought a moral of significantly different character. If paralysis of U.S. policy was attainable through a tactic of incremental introduction of Soviet forces, perhaps an important contributory factor was Washington's appreciation of the size of the Soviet investment in Egypt, the significance of the Soviet position there to Moscow's entire policy in the region, and the threat contained in the IDF's deep penetration raids. Only in these circumstances, it might be argued, was U.S. disposition to act lessened. When the balance of interests was reversed, Moscow was put on notice that the old tiger still had some teeth. In September, Syrian intervention in the Jordanian civil war brought the Sixth Fleet back into the Eastern Mediterranean. The Nixon administration gave evidence of its readiness to join with Israel in preventing a takeover in Jordan by the Soviet-supplied and aided Syrian forces. Soviet reaction to this episode will be examined in more detail below, but it can be summarized here as an effort to appear to have had an important hand in the outcome while behaving with circumspection. In a situation where American traditional interests were endangered and where the Kremlin saw only secondary interests of its own involved, Washington's willingness to adopt a forceful position encountered only a muted response from Moscow.

Thus, the experience of the first semester of 1970 demonstrated the Soviet commitment to defend the heartland of Egypt, to prevent the collapse of the pillar of Soviet policy in the Middle East. It also demonstrated that Washington was not prepared to attempt to interfere

with the Kremlin in this sphere. On the other hand, the second half of 1970 brought a concrete demonstration of U.S. readiness to defend its important regional interests. Moscow had reason to suspect that a Soviet-sponsored invasion of the Sinai would be received entirely differently by the Americans, who stressed the unacceptability of Soviet participation in an effort that might quickly be transformed into a challenge to Israel's existence within the pre-1967 lines.

These elements of the local military balance -- the apparent military stalemate consequent on the cease fire and the delimitation of the bounds of Soviet engagement -- exerted increasing pressure on the Egyptian-Soviet alliance. Discouraged by the costliness of the War of Attrition, fearful that the cross-canal invasion was beyond their unaided capabilities, the Egyptians sought a guarantee of success in an attempt to expel the IDF from the Sinai. This was the conundrum that led to the dramatic exodus of Soviet military personnel in July 1972.

Cairo publicly protested the Kremlin's refusal to supply "offensive" arms, and this refusal was blamed for the postponement of the "inevitable" battle with Israel.[1] President Sadat demanded surface-to-surface missiles and the Mig-25, but his insistence on the criticality of particular weapons systems put the cart before the horse. The Egyptian army had the wherewithal for a cross-canal push but it sought a guarantee of success against its formidable opponent. This could be attained not by means of particular weapons systems but only through

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[1] Lack of "offensive" weapons hindered him in other aspects of the conflict with Israel, Sadat claimed: "If I had a fighter-bomber, I would not have allowed Israel to commit its aggression in southern Lebanon as it has done recently." Quoted by Selim Louzi, editor of the Beirut weekly, al-Hawadess, as cited in the Jerusalem Post, October 6, 1972.

the commitment of substantial Soviet forces in attack.[1] That the Russians were unwilling to do anything of the sort was long suspected but not yet accepted in 1970.[2] Having had to finally face up to that bitter fact, Sadat expelled his benefactors. "The Russians had become a burden to us. They would not fight and would give our enemy an excuse for seeking American support and assistance."[3] Thus, in its fragile progression, the cease fire of 1970 seemed to have tipped the military balance to the Israeli side.[4] The Russians "would not fight", and without their weight applied massively and directly, the defense seemed to have the upper hand in the Canal exchange.

The Egyptian-Soviet rift in 1972 underscored the significance of another major event of 1970. The death of Nasser on September 28 removed from the scene the Arab leader who had been the mainstay of Soviet policy in the Middle East. It is true that in 1967 Nasser

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[1] That a guarantee of success required Soviet troop commitments was due not just to uncertainty on the combat effectiveness of the Egyptian army but also stemmed from the nature of the weapons systems demanded. Whether the Mig-25 is as effective in combat as it is in high-altitude, high-speed reconnaissance remains to be demonstrated. Surface-to-surface missiles with high explosive warheads are notoriously inaccurate. If they were to be used as "city-busters", and especially if they were armed with nuclear warheads, they would invite Israeli preemption or American intervention. If Moscow was prepared to supply the missiles for such a mission, it would have had to be prepared for massive commitment of its own forces.

[2] See below, pp. 36-38.

[3] Selim Louzi, op. cit.

[4] For a typical view of Israel's prewar military position, see Ronald M. DeVore, "The Arab-Israeli Military Balance", Military Review, November 1973, pp. 65-71, reprinted from Revue Militaire Generale, March, 1973.

had brought his Soviet friends to the edge of disaster, but the blame had to be shared by Moscow, which had at least led him astray. Nasser's swift reestablishment of his authority with the help of the Cairo street demonstrations of June 9-10 also insured the preservation of Soviet influence in Egypt. Mollified by the hasty rearmament of Egypt and Syria and by vigorous international political support of the Arab cause, Nasser forgave the Russians their failure to come to his aid at the beginning of June. In turn, the Russians saw Nasser as the dynamic figure who could purge the armed forces of dissident elements, radicalize the society, and cooperate militarily and politically with Moscow. The Soviet leadership was surely sincere in its cable of condolence to the Egyptians mourning Nasser as "a great friend of the Soviet Union", as a "tested and consistent fighter against imperialism", as the man responsible for the fact that "the UAR held a vanguard position in the national liberation movement of the Arab peoples".[1]

Anwar Sadat, for all his recent achievements, has not earned the Kremlin's admiration. Any Egyptian figure coming after Nasser would most likely have been a less forceful and colorful personality. But Nasser's departure from the scene meant more than just the loss of a dynamic and personable leader of the pro-Soviet camp. His replacement was actively involved in a rapid deterioration of Soviet-Egyptian relations. Barely eight months after his entrance into office, Sadat purged the Ali Sabri faction and had its members sentenced to long prison terms. When Podgorny was hastily dispatched to Cairo to repair the damage, he secured Sadat's signature on a Treaty of Friendship that called for prior Egyptian consultation with Moscow on major policy issues. But Sadat's signature did not hinder him from helping Numeiry in Sudan quash a communist-led coup in July 1971, nor from setting deadlines for the resumption of hostilities against Israel without consulting the power that was supposed to rescue him from the consequences

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[1] Izvestiia, September 30, 1970.

of his saber-rattling. Most important of all, of course, Sadat demonstrated the real value of the Treaty by expelling the Russian presence in July 1972.

Not entirely without connection, Moscow began to put more emphasis on its Iraq and Syrian connections. A Treaty of Friendship was concluded with Baghdad, several high level delegations were exchanged, and the Soviet press was clamorous in its support of the June 1, 1972 nationalization of Iraq Petroleum Co. properties. Special marks of favor were shown Syria, including the unprecedented announcement of a shipment of arms. Whether Syria or Iraq could, without significant loss, replace Egypt as the linchpin of the Soviet Union's Middle East policy is debatable, but that is not of direct concern here. The point is that Sadat was not Nasser and the Soviet maneuverings reflected that significant fact.

No doubt, in the wake of the October 1973 war and the oil embargo, the Kremlin takes a kindlier view of Sadat. The impact of the October War is discussed at a later point, but with respect to Sadat, it can be said here that his dependence on King Faisal and the possibility of rapprochement with the United States must be viewed with some concern in Moscow. The importance of Soviet-supplied arms notwithstanding, Sadat has not been a reliable ally and there seems little reason why the Kremlin should expect substantial change in this regard.[1]

September 1970 also marked a profound reversal in the fortunes of the Palestinian fedayeen. Their defeat at the hands of King Hussein's

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[1] The Soviets had their troubles with Nasser too. But the stormy period in their relationship came earlier, during the period of the Syrian-Egyptian union and the competition between Nasser and Kassem of Iraq (1958-1961). By 1964, Khrushchev was awarding Nasser the highest honors as a "Hero of the Soviet Union"

army erased a major threat to the viability of his rule in Jordan. Hashemite Jordan was reestablished as a factor independent of radical Arab forces and thus as one on which American policy could place some reliance. The defeat of the fedayeen also meant the postponement of Egyptian hopes for the creation of an "eastern front" (Syria and Jordan) and paralyzed a radicalizing influence in inter-Arab politics. These developments signified a reverse for the Soviet Union as well.

It may be that the Kremlin committed a significant error in regarding the Jordanian civil war as involving only tangential interests of the Soviet Union. Perhaps Moscow did not view the actual outcome as final; indeed, the expulsion of the fedayeen from Jordan was not finally achieved until the following year. Nevertheless, the defeat of the fedayeen can be viewed as an important setback to the Soviet Union because it helped prevent the polarization of forces in the Middle East.

Polarization constituted one of the two major nightmares of U.S. policy, the other being, of course, superpower military confrontation. All along Washington had sought to prevent the alignment of the Arab states on the side of the Soviet Union, leaving the United States alone with Israel in the region. To forestall polarization, Washington had to obtain the neutrality if not the loyalty of at least some Arab states, but it also had to prevent the broadening of the front of Arab-Israel conflict. Since this was the one issue on which Arab states had to provide at least surface protestations of Arab unity, the broadening of the Arab-Israel conflict risked intensifying anti-American manifestations; it might lead to such radicalization as to completely erode the U.S. position. This set of events was one of the major dangers foreseen in the conflict between the fedayeen and Israel. Israeli reprisals on Jordanian and Lebanese territory were viewed with alarm in Washington as running the danger of throwing these countries too into the radical Arab camp. Thus, the destruction of the fedayeen position in Jordan was

a significant factor in averting the dangers Washington had foreseen.[1]

The history of Soviet relations with the fedayeen remains to be written. Nonetheless, it is apparent that before the September 1970 events Moscow had begun to take a closer look at the Palestinian movements, and Soviet rhetoric on this topic had undergone some subtle changes. In the year before the Six Day War, Moscow took a curiously passive attitude to Syrian-backed Fatah incursions into Israel. To Israeli remonstrances, the Soviets responded that terrorists were figments of Israeli propaganda or else they denied the seriousness of the situation. Perhaps in belated recognition of the provocative role of the Fatah, the Soviet attitude to the fedayeen after the June War was patently hostile. As late as the summer of 1968, the pro-Soviet Arab communist parties denounced the "romantic and reckless course advocated by progressive national patriotic elements of the petty bourgeoisie, horrified by military defeat." [2] Even in the following spring, a Soviet writer termed the goal of "liquidation of the State of Israel and the creation of a 'Palestinian democratic state' ... not realistic". He opposed the notion that "the problem of Palestinian refugees should be accorded first priority in a Middle Eastern political settlement," on the grounds that this would "complicate the solution of the task of liquidating the consequences of the 1967 Israeli aggression and also, in the end, the solution of the Palestinian problem." [3]

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[1] King Hussein's successful campaign against the fedayeen did not completely liquidate their provocative role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their presence in some force in Lebanon and Syria resulted in occasional flareups during 1971-72 along the borders of these countries with Israel. However, the withdrawal of Jordan from the coalition of sanctuary-hosts crippled fedayeen effectiveness. It tended to encourage resistance by the Lebanese government to the freewheeling fedayeen activities and therefore also to eliminate one basis of American pressure on Israel.

[2] An-Nida (Beirut), July 4, 1968.

[3] G. Dad'iants, in Sovetskaia Rossiia, April 15, 1969. Dad'iants was a "political observer" of the Novosti News Agency.

In the last half of 1969 there were signs of reappraisal: attacks on the fedayeen ceased, their cross-border attacks were explicitly and more frequently praised, and on November 27 the Central Committee of the Warsaw Pact countries (Romania abstaining) for the first time raised the issue of "the legitimate right and interests of the Arab people of Palestine."[1] At the beginning of 1970, Arafat was invited to Moscow, although on an unofficial basis. Evidently, these developments reflected a Soviet decision that Moscow could not stand aside from an attempt to influence what appeared increasingly to be one of the most important political developments in the Middle East.

Whatever "defensive" strands may be identified in the Soviet motivation to develop closer relations with the fedayeen (e.g., fear of large scale war triggered by their attacks on Israel), it is also necessary to allow for Moscow's desire to maintain and expand its influence in the region. Both aspects may have had an important Chinese dimension. Ties between the fedayeen and Peking predated the Six Day War, and the Soviet Union had previously displayed its sensitivity to Chinese Communist competition in the Middle East. With respect to Sino-fedayeen ties, the issue was not so much arms supply as ideological-political orientation. Concerned about its leadership in the communist world, Moscow was loath to see Peking establish a foothold in the region of greatest Soviet investment. The USSR was presumably also anxious not to be dragged into conflict with the United States by forces over which it had no control.[2]

The Soviet approach to the fedayeen had to be cautious, given

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[1] TASS, November 27, 1969.

[2] Given its own muted and cautious reaction to the Jordanian Civil War, the Kremlin was visibly irked by the freewheeling propaganda emanating from Peking. "Anyone of sound mind", Radio Moscow lectured the Chinese on October 9, 1970, would recognize that a civil war was "against the interests of the Arab people and the Palestinian Revolution. But Chinese representatives instigated the Palestinians to provoke such a conflict".

the evident inconsistency of full support of the fedayeen with the line of "political solution," whose foundation is the November 1967 Security Council resolution. Among the few things that are clear in that resolution is that a State of Israel is seen as a party to the settlement. On the other hand, the fedayeen called for liquidation of the State of Israel.

It is not self-evident that the fedayeen reaction to Soviet rapprochement would have been necessarily enthusiastic. True, they would not have been overconcerned about Western reactions, given the existing hostility to the United States and Britain. Perhaps there would have been a receptivity to Soviet overtures inherent in the radical rhetoric of the movement. On the other hand, it is doubtful that the Popular Front, the major fedayeen faction with an articulated radical ideology, was anxious to see itself swallowed in a Moscow embrace. Fatah, the largest organization in the group, would certainly have been jealous of its freedom of action and possibly wary of splitting the movement by too close identification with Moscow. Perhaps it was in part for these reasons that the Arab communist parties chose to organize their own fedayeen organization, Al-Ansar, early in 1970, rather than operate through any of the existing ones. The Soviets might have had to hold out a very large carrot to obtain a significant voice in fedayeen affairs.

In any case, if the Soviets had a fedayeen card, its play was preempted by the September 1970 events. Thereafter, Moscow continued to try to keep communication lines open to the fedayeen, maintaining friendly but unofficial relations with Fatah, the largest and least radical component of the movement. But the weaknesses of the fedayeen were still too great to make partnership an immediately realizable option.

The Kremlin now seems to be taking the initiative in seeking to create a role for the Palestinians at the Geneva peace conference, presumably on the basis of abandonment of the maximalist objective of

liquidating the State of Israel. A Soviet note to the Palestine Liberation Organization prodded the fedayeen umbrella organization to reconsider its views on the creation of a Palestinian state, and Soviet leaders have insisted in private talks with Western counterparts that the fedayeen movement would have to be represented at a Middle East peace conference.[1]

Perhaps this reflects Soviet annoyance at the dominant role of the Americans in the ending of the October war and the planning of the peace conference. But given Hussein's aspirations to recover the West Bank, if only in loose confederational relation to the East Bank, and Israel's deeply-rooted conviction of the inevitable irridentism of a Palestinian entity on the West Bank, especially one ruled by Fatah, a major role for the PLO at the peace conference is hardly a foregone conclusion.

However, if the PLO does take a participant's seat at the peace table, it will have acknowledged its readiness to recognize Israel's right to independent existence, at least on the formal level. Such a major policy change, if it occurs, would reflect the recognition that the movement was too weak to continue to insist on its maximal objectives. If it cannot manage the transformation without tearing itself apart, the fedayeen movement will face the threat, as Trotsky would have put it, of "being cast into the dustbin of history." In either case, September 1970 is clearly the turning point.

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[1] New York Times, November 1, 2 and 21, 1973.

III. SOVIET-AMERICAN MILITARY INTERACTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the summer of 1970 Soviet-piloted Mig-21s engaged Israeli fighters in aerial combat over the banks of the Suez Canal. This was the culmination of a deployment of Soviet military forces in the Middle East that constituted the most conspicuous and probably also the most significant change in the regional environment during the 1960s. Most of the Soviet force left Egyptian soil after the break in July 1972. Nevertheless, on the outbreak of war in October 1973, Moscow sharply increased the strength of its Mediterranean fleet, airlifted vast quantities of arms to Egypt and Syria, and threatened to intervene to save an Egyptian army from being throttled in an Israeli encirclement. In the meantime, the rapid buildup of its strategic nuclear forces after Khrushchev's dismissal brought the Soviet Union a position of formally acknowledged "parity" with the United States in the global balance. Under these dramatic shifts in regional and global power relations, how are the rules of the superpower military game being fixed in the Middle East? Has the likelihood of an armed clash between Soviet and American forces in the region increased? Under what conditions is military confrontation possible?

To begin with, it seems unlikely that the strategic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union will in the foreseeable future again become a major focus of either nation's policy in the Middle East. Technology can never be fully predicted, but there seems to be nothing on the technological horizon that is likely to recreate the situation of the 1950s.[1] U.S. forces in the Middle East still have general war capabilities, embodied in the nuclear-tipped missiles of Polaris-Poseidon submarines plying the Mediterranean, as well as in the nuclear payload of the Sixth Fleet's carrier aircraft. Since 1967 the Soviet regional forces designed to counter this strategic threat have been significantly strengthened. Missile-cruisers, submarines

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[1] This point was made in an unpublished paper by Arnold Horelick.

and helicopter carriers[1] appearing in force have undoubtedly taken the edge off the Sixth Fleet's power.

A threat to the survivability of the Fleet is also posed by Soviet or radical Arab aircraft based on the southern littoral of the sea, although the threat is more potential than actual. The number of usable jet aircraft bases in North Africa is large and should Soviet forces appear west of Egypt as they have there, the danger to the Sixth Fleet would become significant and concrete.

But these considerations do not affect the central point. Whereas in the era of the relatively short-legged B-47, the Middle East was believed to have strategic importance for the superpower contest, in the third or fourth generation of ICBMs the strategic balance will continue to operate as a constraint on Soviet and American policy in the Middle East but hardly as the focus of a struggle for control over the region.

On the strategic question itself, there is no gainsaying that, as Brzezinski has put it, "The central reality of the American-Soviet power relationship ... is mutual non-survivability in the event of comprehensive war".[2] But this is not intended as the key to the behavior of the superpowers. There is indeed no rational alternative to the pursuit of mutual accommodation when the world is threatened by nuclear annihilation, as leaders on both sides frequently declare. Yet the pursuit of accommodation does not exhaustively describe Soviet-American relations in any

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[1] Presumably to be joined soon by the USSR's first fixed-wing aircraft carrier now being readied in the Black Sea.

[2] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "USA/USSR: The Power Relationship", cited in International Negotiation. The Impact of the Changing Power Balance, compiled by the Subcommittee on National Security and International Operations of the Committee on Government Operations of the U.S. Senate, USGPO, 1971, p. 8.

arena of their competition, certainly not in third areas. Clearly, neither government is likely to attempt to destroy the other's forces in one particular region of the world in order to alter the global strategic balance. The balance of nuclear power depends upon forces located elsewhere, which are invulnerable to actions taker in the Middle East itself. No conceivable strategic rationale would appear to justify an attempt to eliminate the adversary's forces in the region.

The possibility of confrontation through accident is often mentioned. The fleets of the United States and the Soviet Union in the Mediterranean have over a number of years engaged in sophisticated games of "chicken", in which near brushes have been frequent. There are also possibilities of incidents in which the action of one of the superpowers may be misread as preparation for deliberate attack on the local forces of the other. The outstanding case in point is the dispatch of units of the Sixth Fleet to the scene of the Israeli attack on the U.S.S. Liberty, an American intelligence-monitoring ship, in the last phase of the Six-Day War. Dealing with such problems of accidental war can be negotiated by treaty, as in the Moscow summit arrangement of May 1972, to define the "rules of the road" at sea. Over the years there have developed tacit agreements between the forces of both sides which have regulated the interaction in order to defuse such incidents. At the time of the Liberty affair, President Johnson hastened to use the Hot Line to avoid arousing Soviet fears about a fleet maneuver that might have seemed threatening.

The major danger of superpower confrontation is posed by the risk of involvement through the clash of their local interests. Here we find one of the more common generalizations about Soviet-American interaction. It has been said that strategic inferiority stayed the Soviet hand in earlier crises, such as those of Cuba and Berlin, but as the USSR approached a position of strategic parity with the United States, Soviet behavior in third areas might be expected to become

more audacious. Washington responses might then be expected to become more circumspect as the global balance turned less favorable. Hurewitz noted that "the novelty in the Arab-Israeli third round [i.e., June 1967] was not the Kremlin's signal to the White House that the Soviet Union would not intervene, but the American counter signal that the United States also would not".[1] Of course, the Israelis secured the upper hand immediately and the United States did not have to intervene, although it is possible that the situation was not yet clear to Washington at that point. Nevertheless, the White House hastened to make clear to the Kremlin that Soviet forbearance would be matched on the part of U.S. forces. Apparently, the Administration was delighted to be able to avoid a situation in which the possibility of confronting Soviet power might arise at all. Considering that the Sixth Fleet's superiority over the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron was unquestioned at the time, it appears that Washington was apprehensive over the possible "tripwire" role that Soviet Mediterranean forces might play. The mere pressure of a Soviet force exerted an inhibiting effect upon Washington's freedom of action. It has therefore been frequently asserted, even by those who have taken a jaundiced view of Soviet prospects in the region, that a repetition of the United States operation in Lebanon in 1958 was no longer possible in the Middle East.[2]

However, as Goldhammer has argued, the postulate of a direct relation between the Kremlin's aggressiveness and the favorableness of the strategic balance is at best an oversimplification, if not actually a misreading of the historical record.[3] Soviet policy has experienced twists and turns, but these are difficult to relate to

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[1] J. C. Hurewitz, "Changing Military Perspectives in the Middle East", in P. Y. Hammond and S. S. Alexander, eds., Political Dynamics in the Middle East, American Elsevier, 1972, p. 72.

[2] Paradoxically, the same school of thought also holds that in a showdown, the Soviet squadron would be no match for the Sixth Fleet.

[3] Herbert Goldhammer, The Soviet Union in a Period of Strategic Parity, R-889, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California, November 1971.

changes in the strategic outlook. Moscow's stance in the early post-World War II years was aggressive and activist when its strategic inferiority was greatest; its political line in the third world "softened" in the middle 1950s when the American nuclear lead was being whittled down. In fact, "postwar negative correlation between Soviet aggressiveness and improvement in her strategic position may be a causal relation -- that is, inferiority and its perception produce an aggressive reaction to ward off the dangers of weakness".[1] Aggressive behavior may appear under conditions of growing strength, as was the case with Soviet policy in the Middle East in the middle 1960s, which suggests that knowledge of context and circumstances is critical to understanding of the process. If the national "balance" encompasses more than just the relative size of intercontinental nuclear forces but also that of conventional forces, the general political atmosphere, and the comparative morale of both sides' diplomacy, Goldhammer indicates, the direct relationship between increasing power and increasing aggressiveness may be a better fit of the facts.

The introduction of the elements of political environment and perceived determination of one side or the other complicates the equation but points to a more realistic approach. Thus, the outcome of a crisis of political confrontation between the superpowers may be said to depend on the establishment of relative credibility. Brzezinski has said that where mutual non-survivability is assured, the credibility of either side is achieved by will alone, a situation which tempts both protagonists to elaborate bluff.[2] Presumably, power A must perceive and be overawed by the intensity of power B's will to

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[1] Ibid., p. 33.

[2] Brzezinski, op. cit., p. 11

achieve the particular goal. Only if A can be convinced that the goal is so important to B that the latter is prepared to risk all, can B's credibility be established. Thus, A's perception of the place of the particular goal in B's objectives function -- that is, the overall priority accorded the goal -- rather than relative strategic superiority per se, ultimately determines which protagonist prevails in a crisis.[1] One must add, following Goldhammer, the general political environment and the perception of each other's political strengths and weaknesses as factors in establishing the credibility of each side's political-military posture.

This relates to situations in which the threat of central war is a tangible factor influencing both sides' calculations. Are there military actions the Soviet Union can undertake against U.S. or NATO forces in the Middle East that would not involve a high probability of general war? Gasteyger has argued that the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean would "make it easy for her to cut important supply lines to Europe during a crisis. If one remembers that in any one day there are usually about 2,600 merchant ships in the Mediterranean... one can appreciate the degree of Western vulnerability to any threat coming from a powerful adversary."[2] Evidently, Gasteyger foresaw the possibility of the Soviet Union undertaking blockade or interdiction of the sea-lanes leading to the northern shores of the Mediterranean. However, he did not explicitly address the question of how the Soviet Union could expect to interfere with Western sea or air communications and still keep the conflict in the framework of a limited war.

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[1] See also A.L. George and others, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy: Laos, Cuba, Vietnam, Boston, 1971.

[2] Curt Gasteyger, Conflict and Tension in the Mediterranean, Adelphi Papers, Number 51, London, The Institute for Strategic Studies, September 1968, p. 5.

The threat postulated by Gasteyger belongs to the general category known as "outflanking NATO from the south."[1] Soviet SLBMs in the Mediterranean may enhance the military threat to NATO's southern flank over and above the land-based nuclear forces targeted thereon, although many observers believe that the Soviet Squadron has serious weaknesses in a nuclear offensive role, even granting the degradation of the Sixth Fleet's power. If the NATO alliance were interpreted unambiguously to mean that a threat to one member was a threat to all, it is difficult to see why a threat from the south would more likely be confronted only with limited power than a threat from the north. A Soviet attack on Greece from naval units in the Mediterranean -- provided, again, that the alliance held up -- would be indistinguishable from an attack by ground forces along any of the ground fronts in Europe.

A less common formulation of the outflanking threat is the possibility of proxy threats to NATO members -- e.g., by Bulgaria. The major problem with scenarios of this type is that Moscow might find it hard to believe that an attack on Greece or Turkey by a Bulgarian army would not imply a very high probability of U.S. involvement. If the use of a proxy is to diminish significantly the likelihood of triggering a NATO response, the result would be conditional on increasing disaffection between NATO's western and eastern wings or an apparent U.S. reluctance to walk the brink over Greece or Turkey.

This suggests, in fact, that the threat to NATO resides not in a classic military outflanking maneuver but in the more subtle danger of the dissolution of alliance ties, of the rupture of solidarity between its southern and western flanks on the one hand, or with the United States on the other. How much Soviet power in the Mediterranean, or the Soviet Squadron specifically, contributes to this danger is not easy to appraise. However, there is a strong desire in Europe to bury the cold war. American response to the growth of Soviet forces in the Mediterranean seems to many to pose a danger of nuclear war. The U.S.

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[1] Gasteyger, however, insists that cutting supply lines is different from "outflanking".

effort to resupply Israel via European staging areas to counter the Soviet airlift during the October War and the subsequent worldwide alert of U.S. forces, called when the Kremlin seemed to be contemplating direct intervention, were met by resentment and official disassociation in Western Europe.

In general, however, the idea that the buildup of Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean has limited U.S. freedom to exert power in the region relates not so much to the problem of outflanking NATO as to that of the application of U.S. power on the southern and eastern littorals of the Mediterranean. Even if it wished to, Washington could not often engage in gunboat diplomacy in the Middle East because the environment of radical nationalism makes that an outmoded form of international "discourse". But to what extent is the Russian presence a significant contributing deterrent, owing to U.S. fear that the superpowers will clash through a process of escalation in defense of their local interests? The willingness of the powers to confront each other may depend in part on their estimate of the likelihood of victory based on the local military balance, but more importantly, it will hinge on their perception of the extent of each side's "vital interests" in the region, on considerations of the other power's determination to resist, and on the degree of confidence either may have that local conflict will not get out of hand and escalate uncontrollably to general war.

Suppose a government of Lebanon, "duly constituted and recognized," were to seek U.S. aid to prevent a Syrian-supported fedayeen takeover. On finding ships of the Sixth Fleet steaming towards Beirut, would elements of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron interpose themselves between the American ships and the Lebanese shore? Would the Soviet ships fire on the incoming American forces? If the Sixth Fleet's superiority is manifest, would Moscow be ready to confront American power in a situation that might bring on a humiliating defeat in a limited war or require the threat of nuclear war to provide a good chance of a favorable outcome?

An analogous dilemma presented itself to Soviet decisionmakers in September 1970 in connection with the Jordanian-Syrian crisis. In barest outline, the events in Jordan may be summarized as follows:[1] As the culmination of months of intermittent clashes between the Jordanian army and fedayeen forces and after the hijacking of three airlines which were then forced to land in a fedayeen-controlled field in northern Jordan, full scale fighting broke out on September 17. Hussein's troops were in control of the south, but the battle raged on in Amman while the fedayeen held large parts of the north. On September 19, Amman accused Damascus of an invasion of Jordan with armored forces; two armored columns crossed the frontier from Syria early on the 20th. Initially, a Jordanian attempt to throw back the Syrian column fared badly, and the King was alarmed enough to ask the U.S. and Britain to consider what military aid could be quickly supplied to him. On the 22nd, Jordanian Hawker Hunters attacked the Syrian tanks, inflicting considerable damage, and the Syrians began to withdraw the following day.

From the inception of the crisis, the possibility of American intervention loomed large. On September 17, the Chicago Sun Times quoted President Nixon as saying that the United States might intervene if Syria or Iraq intervened. The President also hinted that the Soviets should not count on Washington's "rationality" or predictability. On the 19th, Secretary Rogers denounced the Syrian invasion and declared that it threatened to widen the war. Administration hints of possible intervention were transmitted in a variety of inspired leaks. With reinforcements from the Atlantic on the way, the Sixth Fleet was dispatched to patrol off the coasts of Israel and Lebanon; American troops were alerted in both the United States and Europe. Simultaneously, Moscow was being warned directly of the dangers inherent in the Syrian action. Moreover, the Israelis had mobilized partially, moving 400 tanks to the Golan Heights and putting the Air Force on alert. A U.S. -

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[1] For additional detail on the course of the crisis and on U.S. policy, see Henry Brandon's part ("Were We Masterful ...") of the dialogue on "Jordan: The Forgotten Crisis," Foreign Policy, Spring 1973, pp. 158-70.

backed Israeli intervention loomed as a serious possibility.

How did the Soviets respond? Official representations to Washington stressed the Kremlin's efforts to prevent a widening of the war.[1] Publicly, Moscow confined itself to deploring the fratricidal conflict in Jordan and to pointing to the opportunity being offered for imperialist intervention. On September 20, the first official and public Soviet reaction came in the form of a TASS statement. The statement expressed "alarm" at reports of the Sixth Fleet movements to the eastern Mediterranean and of plans for foreign military intervention. "Such development of events would aggravate the situation in the Middle East and ... would essentially complicate the international situation as such. The situation in Jordan and around it causes deep concern in the Soviet Union...." The final two paragraphs are worth citing in full:

> It is believed in the Soviet Union that foreign armed intervention in the events in Jordan would aggravate the conflict, hamper the Arab nations' struggle for liquidating the consequences of Israel's aggression, for a lasting peace with justice in the Middle East, for restoration of their violated rights and national interests. All who cherish the cause of peace and come out for strengthening international security cannot put up with such a development.
>
> The Arab countries and peoples may be confident that the Soviet Union will continue to pursue a policy of supporting their just struggle for ensuring their full independence and national development, for preserving and strengthening the peace of the world.

The following day, September 21, a Radio Moscow broadcast in Arabic seemed to promise only sympathy: "Should the U.S. military intervention in Jordan take place, it would further aggravate the Middle East crisis and make the Arab struggle to remove the consequences of Israeli aggression and to regain their usurped rights and national interests more difficult." By the evening of September 21, the Kremlin was hinting that it was cautioning the Syrians while simul-

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[1] Ibid.

taneously urging Washington to restrain the Israelis from moving in on the battle. According to the New York Times account of October 8, ships of the Soviet Squadron kept close tabs on the Sixth Fleet during the crisis, even intermingling with American warships. After the immediate crisis passed, the Soviets staged a show of force,[1] but no effort was made at any time to interfere with Sixth Fleet movements. Moscow was careful to provide no signal that it contemplated frustrating American designs by force.

After the crisis peak, too, Brezhnev felt it possible to warn at Baku on October 2 that "one may not only burn one's fingers but may even lose one's hand."[2] But the sentence immediately following spoke of the "stormy reaction" and "demonstration of the peoples' wrath" (emphasis supplied) that would have been triggered by "imperialist military intervention."[3]

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[1] Between the 27th of September and the 27th of November four Soviet cruisers, fourteen destroyers, five submarines, and various other vessels passed into the Mediterranean from the Black Sea. During the same period, two cruisers, six destroyers, two submarines, and various other support vessels left the Mediterranean to return to the Black Sea. There was therefore a net increase in the Mediterranean Squadron of two cruisers, eight destroyers, three submarines and a patrol vessel. The number of support ships was drawn down in various categories. Cumhuriyet (Istanbul), December 7, 1970.

[2] Pravda, October 3, 1970. The echo of Khrushchev's missile-rattling in November 1956 after becoming convinced that the U.S. would not intervene on the Anglo-French-Israeli side is weak but still striking.

[3] In the second half of the dialogue on "Jordan: The Forgotten Crisis", cited in the note on p. 27, David Schoenbaum ("Or Lucky", pp. 171-181) concludes that the United States "was very lucky in September 1970" (p. 181), because the threats to intervene were not credible. Schoenbaum's case rests on evidence of inadequacy of the military means, the lack of suitable friendly bases in the Middle East, and post-Cambodia domestic opposition to U.S. involvement in another war. He suggests that only the Israeli threat to intervene was credible to Syrians and Russians alike.

Schoenbaum's argument is unconvincing because it ignores the actual Soviet response. Had Moscow perceived the U.S. moves as empty bluff, the Soviet reaction would hardly have been as restrained as it was in fact. The threat of an IDF intervention should have occasioned a vigorous attempt to head it off -- in the manner of the propaganda campaigns of 1966-67. It was the credible threat of U.S. backing for

The Soviet media portrayed the USSR as having had an important role in damping down the crisis and in preventing U.S. intervention. A Pravda review by Vitaly Korionov on the 4th of October 1970 declared:

> The decisive rebuff which met Washington's attempt to heat up the situation in the Middle East region is sufficiently instructive. According to the unanimous appraisal of the international public, the Soviet Union's firm, consistent, peace-loving policy was of special importance in sobering the "hotheads" in the Pentagon. In their turn, the Arab government leaders -- and the late Gamal Abdel Nasser played a particularly important role in this -- found it within their power to normalize the situation in Jordan.

Krasnaia zvezda of the same date went even further, claiming that the "Jordanian events reaffirmed that the Arab countries, which are striving for a political settlement of the Middle East conflict, can count on the Soviet Union's support in the future, too." Thus, the Soviet Union made the retrospective claim that far from having acted circumspectly, it was instrumental in organizing collective action of the Arab states to help stop the fratricide before U.S. forces could intervene.[1]

Israeli intervention that made the Kremlin circumspect. Schoenbaum himself admits "there are plausible reasons" for believing the American threat was credible in at least some respects. "All international politics has an element of psychodrama. Great Powers, including the United States, live by their capacity to inspire confidence in some, uncertainty in others " (p. 179).

[1] See also D. Volsky, "Lessons of the Jordan Crisis", New Times, No. 42, October 21, 1970, p. 8, and a statement by the Lebanese Communist Party Central Committee in An-Nida (Beirut), October 24, 1970.

What would have happened if the superpower roles had been reversed, if say, Soviet forces had been dispatched to put down a counter-revolution against a Moscow-oriented Syrian regime? Lewis has argued that a "Lebanon-1958" type of operation could not be carried out now by the Russians either, for the same "trip-wire" reasons alleged to impede U.S. action.[1] The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron is considered weak in critical respects -- organic air defense, amphibious attack, and ground support. A moderate-size sophisticated air force could constitute a serious threat to the Squadron. However, what appears to be a significant weakness in theory may not be so in fact. If attacked by the Soviets, the Israelis might well respond in kind. But short of a Soviet first strike on the Sixth Fleet, would the latter be likely to be put into action against the Soviet Squadron if the Soviets were mounting a "Lebanon 1958" operation of their own?

The resolution of such crises probably depends more on the balance of perceived interests than on that of arms. Given the strong uncertainties as to the outcome of a superpower engagement even with conventional weaponry, neither power will want to risk a military clash, other things equal, except in defense of a major interest that the other side can be counted on to recognize. In face of American power mobilizing to protect a U.S. client in Jordan, the USSR saw no compelling reason to risk war with the United States. Perhaps if the retreat of the Syrian tanks had been followed by an Israeli armored thrust against Damascus, Moscow might have bared its teeth, as it threatened to do on Saturday, June 10, 1967. The same logic would hold for a Soviet-mounted "Lebanon 1958" operation: it is unlikely that the U.S. would feel compelled to threaten intervention unless an invasion of Jordan, Israel, or Lebanon seemed to be in the offing.[2]

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[1] Bernard Lewis, "The Great Powers, the Arabs and the Israelis", Foreign Affairs, 47:4 (July 1969), p. 644.

[2] Presumably, Saudi Arabia is in the same class of protected clients, but this is not the place for a discussion of Persian Gulf contingencies.

Thus, it seems a considerable oversimplification to assert that Soviet penetration of the Middle East prevents a replay of "Lebanon 1958". "Jordan 1970" suggested that the U.S. could still land marines on a friendly Mediterranean shore. Washington is unlikely to undertake such an operation, but that is because the length of friendly Arab shore has virtually disappeared and because support for "carrier diplomacy" has been deeply eroded in the United States.[1]

Moscow's reluctance to interpose its forces between the Sixth Fleet and the Middle Eastern landing point may be partly related to its realization that the Soviet Squadron is not yet an effective war-fighting force. If the function of the Squadron in confrontation with the Sixth Fleet were that of a tripwire alone, keeping the U.S. forces at arm's length would seem to require only a token presence but the assurance of escalation to central war. But a tripwire is a crude as well as dangerous policy instrument. It can be safely used only where the other side can, with utmost confidence, be relied on to perceive both the "vital" nature of the interest being defended and the certainty of a nuclear response if shooting breaks out. Since these conditions are not likely to hold in most conceivable scenarios, Moscow might consider the military defects of its Mediterranean forces as a significant weakness of its regional posture.

Whether Soviet policy would be emboldened by repairing the major gap of air cover remains to be seen.[2] One suspects that even under these conditions, the perception of relative interests and degree of resolve would still be critical. It remains an elementary but still

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[1] It should be emphasized that the argument is only with respect to the feasibility of U.S. intervention without Soviet interference; whether intervention would be the best course of action under the circumstances is another matter.

[2] Operation from Egyptian bases before July 1972 was at best only a partial solution of the air cover problem.

The Soviet capability for intervention has been enhanced by the development of its military airlift. According to Drew Middleton (New York Times, October 26, 1973), approximately 100 Antonov-22 long-range transports make up the core of this force. Soviet airborne troops are supposed to have grown from 7 divisions in 1971 to 12-13 now, with a total mobilized strength of 85,000 - 100,000 men.

valid proposition that the "disutility" of nuclear conflict weighs so heavily in the calculation of its expected "value" that subjective probabilities of nuclear war have to be small indeed for confrontations to be risked. It is necessary to stress the equally elementary point that only subjective probabilities are relevant. The possibility of divergences between subjective and objective probabilities contributes to making our era more "interesting", in the sense in which the ancient Chinese would wish for their enemies to live in "interesting" times.

These issues are central to the outcome of the most dangerous Soviet-American confrontation scenarios, those developing from the resumption of large-scale fighting along the Middle Eastern cease-fire lines. The dangers were muted in the October 1973 round of the Arab-Israeli war, largely because of the surprising effectiveness of the Arab forces, especially of their missile air defense systems, which prevented the IDF from mounting sustained air attacks on rear areas. Therefore, one much feared confrontation scenario, featuring a Soviet response to Israeli deep-penetration counter attacks that then evoked U.S. intervention, was obviated from the start. In its sharp response on October 24-25, the Nixon Administration may have prevented a Soviet intervention to break the Israeli stranglehold on an Egyptian force isolated on the East Bank. However, Washington called the worldwide alert not to force the capitulation of the Egyptians -- Kissinger is reported to have told a visitor shortly after the crisis that he had no desire to see the Israelis take 70,000 Egyptian prisoners -- but to deter the introduction of a substantial Soviet military presence that by its threat to the integrity of the IDF might compel more direct counter-involvement on the part of the United States.[1]

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[1] The Kremlin first suggested joint U.S.-Soviet intervention to force the Israelis to back off. Had the Administration not insisted on the deletion from the Nixon-Brezhnev Agreement of June 22, 1973 of a clause committing the sides to joint intervention anywhere in the world where the danger of nuclear conflict arose (Flora Lewis, New York Times, July 22, 1973), the script on October 24-25 might have read differently.

The Soviet reaction to the U.S. tough stand on October 24-25 was also in character. There was a total absence of bluster in Moscow. Instead, the setback was accepted with little visible irritation[1] and a cool denial that the USSR had any of the intentions ascribed to it in Washington. But given the American commitment to preserving the cease fire and the Egyptian foothold on the East Bank, formalized in a U.N. compromise resolution the next day, the Soviet stake and therefore Moscow's defeat were diminished.

However, the relatively smooth disposition of this problem is no guarantee that the next crisis along the Canal or on the Syrian heights will be resolved without Soviet direct intervention. Only if the political-military context remains unchanged -- that is, if the calculations in both Washington and Moscow of relative interest, power, and determination continue to appear as they did in 1970-73 -- is it likely that the Soviet decision will not be significantly altered. Deterrence is not an automatic mechanism in the system of Soviet-American interactions in the Middle East. The metaphor should perhaps be biological rather than mechanical: a plant to be nurtured and watched over, not a machine that can be programmed and then safely left unsupervised.

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[1] Except perhaps at President Nixon's disclosure of an exchange of toughly worded messages between himself and Leonid Brezhnev. New York Times, October 27 and 28, 1973.

IV. THE POLITICS OF CONFRONTATION AVOIDANCE

The record of Soviet-American interaction in the Middle East, beginning with the 1967 crisis, demonstrates a far more pronounced interest by both powers in avoiding mutual confrontation than in marching to the brink in pursuit of particular regional objectives. Given the still primitive state of mechanics of Soviet-American consultation, which must be largely related to the ideological awkwardness of their rapprochement, the business of skirting the whirlpool of superpower conflict is conducted mainly in relations between the superpowers and their regional clients. For Moscow this has involved, since the June 1967 war, its ties with Egypt, as contrasted with the pivotal role of Syria before the war.

For five years after the June debacle , Moscow had been counseling patience and faith in the ultimate efficacy of the strategy of "political solution". Cairo's confidence in its Soviet mentors had been wearing thin for some time -- at least since March 1971[1] — but sounds of despair over the prolongation of the "crime" of "no war, no peace"[2] became audibly loud in the spring of 1972.[3] Heykal, in a burst of poetic emotion, demanded that "the calm which now crouches over the

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[1] See the excerpts from Sadat's speech at a closed meeting of Egyptian newspaper publishers, published in Newsweek, August 7, 1972. After the purge of the Ali Sabry faction in May 1971 and the Egyptian intervention in support of Gen. Numeiry's crushing of a communist coup in Sudan in July, Heykal warned of Soviet estrangement: Arab relations with the Soviet Union had to be improved "without the least delay." Al-Ahram, August 27, 1971.

[2] See Heykal's columns in al-Ahram of June 16, 23, 30 and July 7, 1972.

[3] For example, Sadat's May Day speech (Cairo Radio, May 3, 1972) and his replies to questions from members of the Central Committee of the Arab Socialist Union (al-Akhbar, April 25, 1972). See also the report of a seminar on the Moscow summit meeting in al-Ahram, May 19, 1972.

area like a nightmare should disperse, the whizzing of bullets should be heard, and the flames of fire should be seen soaring from afar."[1] The failure of the Moscow summit meeting to promise a political means of restoring the Sinai to Egypt, expected though that failure may have been, heightened Cairo's agitation. When it became clear, as Sadat contemptuously put it, that Moscow "would not fight", Cairo expelled the Soviet air and ground forces.

That the USSR was anxious to avoid a military confrontation with the United States over the conflict of their respective clients' interests had not been a secret to any Egyptian leader after the shock of being "abandoned" by Moscow during the Six Day War. But the hardness of that fact of life remained to be tested and thoroughly appreciated. On the morrow of the June War, Cairo looked to a replay of the 1956 denouement -- evacuation of the Israeli forces under combined Soviet-American pressure. The disappointment of that expectation, when Lyndon Johnson refused to emulate Dwight Eisenhower, forced Nasser to turn to a strategy designed to raise the price to the Israelis of continued occupation of the conquered territories -- to raise it to unacceptable levels. Thus was born the strategem of the War of Attrition, with its natural foundation in Soviet artillery tactics and weapons supply.

The overall Egyptian conception was attractively simple. It was true that the Soviet Union would not back an effort to eliminate the State of Israel: "The USSR, because of its world responsibilities, could not support us in this because such support would mean it would

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[1] Al-Ahram, June 9, 1972.

have to be prepared for nuclear war with the United States."[1] But Soviet military support was available for a "political solution", "eliminating the consequences of the 1967 aggression", because Washington could not unconditionally endorse Israeli occupation of the captured territories.[2] Between the hammer of Arab military blows and the anvil of great power pressure, Israel would be forced to accept an Arab-favored settlement. Cairo expected, as Heykal suggested delicately, that "success in imposing a political solution ... will create in the entire area and its vicinity a new situation whose effects on the future cannot yet be predicted".[3]

The realization of the "political solution" depended on successful prosecution of the War of Attrition, but that was seriously threatened by the IDF's employment of air power as a counter-artillery weapon from the second half of 1969. A left-wing periodical quotes "one of the principal makers of Egyptian policy ..., a man who was continually at the side of the Rais during these years and who enjoyed his total confidence", as saying that Nasser then decided to "transform the Israeli-Arab conflict into a Soviet-American one", to secure "Soviet military engagement at Egypt's side".[4] In the first half of 1970 Nasser

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[1] Heykal in al-Ahram, December 3, 1970.

[2] Cf. Kissinger's oft-cited distinction (from a background briefing in June 1970) between defending Israel's existence and protecting Israel's 1967 conquests.

[3] Al-Ahram, March 10, 1972.

[4] Simon Malley, "L'engagement soviétique en Egypte", Africasia, December 7, 1970, pp. 12-13. Compare Heykal: "Nasser succeeded in heightening the danger of the conflict from the local to the international level through his secret visit to the USSR in January 1970". Al-Ahram, July 7, 1972.

undoubtedly felt that he had secured concrete physical assurance that the Soviets would not allow another Egyptian disaster. But having paused for a breather in August, Nasser had not yet tested the limits of Soviet readiness to intervene directly in the military conflict. It was left to his successor to learn the unpleasant truth.

The inevitable crisis was delayed for eighteen months. In part the delay may be explained by the Egyptian fascination with exotic tools of war. Moscow was pressed to supply surface-to-surface missiles or Mig-25s and fobbed Cairo off with one excuse or another.[1] The issue of whether Soviet forces would directly support an Egyptian attempt to recapture all or part of the Sinai was probably never posed bluntly, and the Soviets managed in a series of ambiguous statements to appear to be promising more far-reaching support than they were actually prepared to provide. Politburo Candidate-Member Boris Ponomarev in Cairo on December 11, 1970 pledged that the Soviet Union would "support the struggle of the people and the leaders of the United Arab Republic under all circumstances."[2] Almost exactly a year later, al-Goumhouriya quoted the Soviet Ambassador, V.M. Vinogradov, in a more explicit pledge: "If it is to be war, we will support you so that it will be a war with minimum losses".[3]

Moreover, the Kremlin's political support was unstinting on the key issues of the Middle Eastern crisis. One example was arms control.

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[1] See the report of Sadat's unpublished speech in Newsweek, August 7, 1972. In his second report on the expulsion to the Central Committee of the Arab Socialist Union on July 24, Sadat summarized the Soviet response to his repeated requests during his visits to Moscow: "They say, yes, yes, yes, to make things easy for us, but then we are caught in a whirlwind". New York Times, July 25, 1972.

[2] New York Times, December 13, 1970.

[3] Cited in New York Times, December 17, 1971.

Although control of arms supply to Israel and the Arabs was constantly urged by the United States as an important means of avoiding superpower confrontation in the region, Moscow turned a deaf ear to such suggestions. Washington's appeal for "restraint" was denounced as misdirected and hypocritical, considering the sizable military support it provided Israel.[1] Soviet military assistance to the Arab states was in the interests of peace because it was directed to deterring or repelling Israeli aggression.[2] Until a political settlement is reached, Brezhnev told the 24th Party Congress, the USSR would "continue its firm support of its Arab friends". After a settlement, "we feel there could be a consideration of further steps designed for a military detente in the whole area, in particular for converting the Mediterranean into a sea of peace and friendly cooperation".[3] Two months later, Brezhnev declared: "We have never considered it an ideal situation to have the fleets of the great powers spending long periods cruising far away from their own shores. We are prepared to resolve this problem, but as the phrase goes, on equal terms".[4]

Evidently, the Politburo was not merely defending Egyptian interests in rejecting U.S. regional arms control initiatives. Consolidation of the Soviet position in the Middle East was obviously a concurrent objective. While Brezhnev hinted at mutual limitations on the superpower deployments, Soviet sources also insisted that since the Black Sea connects to the Mediterranean, the USSR is by definition and right a Mediterranean naval power.[5] Washington may have viewed arms control in the Middle East as a means of limiting the supply of sophisticated weaponry to the states of the region, but in Moscow it was asserted that "any projects directed to dispelling tension [in the region] would

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[1] E.g., V. Petrusenko, in Pravda, March 15, 1972.

[2] E.g., D. Vol'skii, in Izvestiia, February 17, 1972.

[3] Pravda, March 31, 1971.

[4] Pravda, June 12, 1971.

[5] M. Petrov, "Proiski voenshchiny SShA na 'iuzhnom flange NATO'", Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil, No. 18, September 1971, p. 82.

not achieve their goal and would, in fact, yield the opposite result, if they were to ignore or leave untouched the imperialist position of strength in the Mediterranean -- in the form of bases, fleets and military alliance systems."[1]

So, too, the Soviet Union fully supported and encouraged Egypt in the latter's insistence on an Israeli commitment to full withdrawal from all occupied territories before Cairo would enter into the interim arrangement the U.S. State Department was promoting in 1971.[2] Since the new American initiative involved reopening the Suez Canal, it might be thought that the Kremlin would be attracted to the proposal. But Moscow gave every evidence of shunning the bait, evidently because it feared the hook of U.S. sponsorship.[3] The Kremlin was certainly not anxious to provoke a showdown with its major Middle Eastern client.

Having secured Sadat's signature on the Treaty of Friendship on May 27, 1971, whose seventh article called for regular consultation and concerting policy, Moscow may have thought it also obtained Sadat's recognition of the wisdom of Soviet leadership. Perhaps it was this misplaced confidence that induced the Kremlin to call the Egyptian bluff and declare publicly, on the occasion of the Moscow visits of Sadat in April and Sidky in July 1972, its belief that Cairo now had the right to use any and all means to recapture the occupied territory.[4] But Sadat had signed a piece of paper in exchange for some advanced hardware and the prospect of direct Soviet involvement, and when neither package was forthcoming he was not loath to demonstrate

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[1] Ia. Bronin, "Problemy sredizemnomor'ia i imperialisticheskaia strategiia", Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, No. 9, September 1971, p. 25.

[2] See for example, the Riad-Gromyko communique in Pravda. July 5, 1971. See also V. Nekrasov (deputy chief editor of Pravda), on Radio Moscow, June 6, 1971, and E. Primakov, in Pravda, January 5, 1972.

[3] For evidence of Soviet suspicions that some Egyptians were succumbing to the American lures, see E. Primakov, in Pravda, June 5, 1971, and R. Petrov, "Step Towards Arab Unity", New Times, No. 35, September 1971, p. 22.

[4] Pravda, April 30 and July 15, 1972.

how little his signature had meant.

Though it was doubtless stung by the unexpected blow, the Kremlin rightly took a long view. Sadat really had nowhere else to turn; sooner or later he (or a successor) would have to return to the fold. Where else would Cairo find the arms supply (even with the limitations Sadat publicly decried), the economic aid, and the political support the USSR granted so unstintingly? The United States was inextricably linked to Israeli "expansionism" in defense of "imperialist" positions in the Middle East, and Sadat would find only crumbs distributed from Washington's table.[1]

If Cairo repented, would not Moscow welcome back its prodigal? Egypt remained the most populous, the most powerful of Arab states -- the natural leader of the Arab world. No change of stance or regime could affect Egypt's geostrategic position at the hinge of Asia and Africa. Four centuries earlier Henri IV thought conversion to Catholicism a small price to pay for a unified French monarchy: Paris was worth a Mass. When the break came, the Kremlin evidently believed retention of a Soviet position in Egypt was worth ingesting its pride and bided its time.[2]

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[1] Apart from whatever hopes he may have entertained of inducing the Kremlin to become more aggressive in his behalf, Sadat's move to expel his mentors may have been motivated also by fears and hopes pertaining to U.S. policy. U.S. - Israel relations were becoming overtly and progressively warmer after Prime Minister Meir's visit to Washington in December 1971, and Sadat may have felt that an opening to the west had to be broken through before it was too late. But he either failed to prepare the ground adequately or had grossly overestimated his cards. What awaited him in Washington was only mild encouragement and the demand for "proximity" negotiations which could easily be transformed into direct negotiations.

[2] It did not have too long to wait. The first Soviet military delegation to visit Egypt after the 1972 break arrived in Cairo on February 12, 1973. After the October War, the Arabs would be reminded of the military cooperation article in the Soviet Egyptian Treaty of May 1971: "During those days of October, the world witnessed the fruits of this cooperation" (Radio Moscow in Arabic, October 30, 1973).

Rather than risk being dragged along by its desperate client into confrontation with U.S. power, Moscow accepted the humiliation of expulsion with dignity and studied indifference. In the framework of the worldwide alliance of anti-imperialist forces, a Soviet foreign policy commentator had noted some six weeks before, "each of its participants, while struggling for the solution of common tasks and for progress toward common objectives, takes its own path -- namely, the path that most fully corresponds with particular features of its situation and which is in accordance with its opportunities". The Soviet Union's contribution to the general revolutionary cause and its "revolutionary duty" includes the pursuit " of a policy of peace, the peaceful coexistence of countries with different social systems, and of relaxation of international tension".

Moscow refused to be tied to the principle that it must toughen its position in response to "one or another tough action by imperialism". "The strength of socialist policy has never lain in primitiveness and stereotype, and even less in an identical repetition of the modes and methods used by the class enemy". Soviet foreign policy combines "a firm rebuff to imperialism's aggressive actions with great flexibility in the approach to one or another disputed problem". Its watchword is "principled firmness and tactical flexibility". Almost as if he were speaking directly to Egyptian critics of Soviet policy, the commentator warned against the short-sightedness that prevented "a correct combination of current immediate tasks of the present with the long term prospects and objectives of the future. ... The revolutionary of the present never lives by the interests solely of the present".[1]

Whatever private suspicions it may have had that such was the basic Soviet attitude, Washington long felt unsure that an Egyptian attempt to embroil the USSR in another Middle East war would not succeed. Hence, up to 1972, the fear of confrontation with the Soviet Union in

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[1] Vadim Zagladin, "Printsipal'nost' i posledovatel'nost'", Novoe vremia, No. 22, May 26, 1972, pp. 4-5.

the Middle East had been a major goad to U.S. policy makers. Of the possible avenues to reducing the danger of confrontation, the United States patiently and persistently explored two of the three: (1) reducing the danger of resumption of war between Israel and the Arab states; (2) diminishing the incentive of the Soviet Union to involve itself directly on the side of Egypt or Syria if war broke out.

Washington's efforts concentrated on the first of these approaches, largely by seeking to promote a settlement of the underlying conflict, but also by attempting to preserve a "balance of power" in the region to deter Arab attack on Israel. Unable to secure Soviet agreement to a joint limitation on the flow of sophisticated weapons to the region, the Administration reluctantly but periodically reinforced the IDF. The second approach involved occasional warnings to Moscow about the dangers of adventurist action, but was largely based on the maintenance of the Sixth Fleet in the area and the lasting impact of the Fleet's maneuvering in the Eastern Mediterranean in the fall of 1970.

A third possibility would be to weaken the U.S. commitment to Israel's defense.[1] But five years of concern with growing Soviet power in the Mediterranean and frequent spells of fear that the fuse of the Middle Eastern "powder keg" was sputtering did not bring the United States to disassociate itself from Israel. Indeed, the warmth of the tie in 1972 was at an all-time peak. Yet the euphoria was of recent origin. Was it also fated to be of brief duration? A summary

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[1] Pressure on Israel may be envisaged in other forms but their ultimate impact is on the informal U.S. guarantee of Israel's survival. This is true even of financial pressures -- e.g., cutting off economic aid or removing the tax-exempt status of private donations. It is inconceivable that such actions could be taken without at least affecting others' perceptions of U.S. readiness to ward off threats to Israel's security, and most likely they would be possible only if significant changes occurred in U.S. Government and public views on U.S.-Israel relations.

review of one of the major crisis points in U.S.-Israel relations -- December 1969 -- may highlight the important planes of friction between the two countries, then and now.

In December 1969, the revelation of the Rogers Plan for Israel-Egypt and Israel-Jordan arrangements, in the words of a New York Times report (December 22, 1969), "provoked what appears to be the gravest crisis of confidence between the United States and Israel in nine months of international peace-making efforts". It was in fact the gravest crisis of confidence in the 30 months that had elapsed since the Six Day War. Not since the Eisenhower Administration pressured Israel into withdrawing from Sinai and Gaza in early 1957 had there been such bitterness in Israel over American policy. Mrs. Meir's vehement rejection of the American proposals -- declaring that it would be "treasonous" for any Israeli government to accept them, accusing the United States of "appeasement" -- were unprecedented in their public explicitness.

An observer on the sidelines, noting the other side's reaction to previous settlement proposals, might have wondered at the heat of the Israeli response. Rejection of the current set of proposals by the Arabs and the Soviets seemed in the cards, and Israel might have saved itself the pain of rubbing its only important friend the wrong way. Israelis, however, were not concerned about Soviet or Arab acceptance of the proposals then on the table; indeed, rejection by all sides was seen as inevitable in Jerusalem as well. The note of anguish in Israel's response was evoked by fear of further erosion of the American position under the pressure of the Arabs, the "oil interests", and the Four Power negotiations.

In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Jerusalem was delighted to discover that far from wanting to repeat the 1957 experience, when Israel was pressured into evacuating Sinai and the Gaza Strip with only the vaguest "understanding" about an Egyptian quid pro quo, the Johnson Administration backed the Israeli strategy of

trading territory for a "real peace". Jerusalem and Washington shared the conviction that the 1949 armistice arrangements were no longer tolerable and that the time had come to settle only for a directly negotiated, contractual peace treaty. By the time it left office, the Johnson Administration had weakened its position considerably, and its adherence to the basic postulate of peace via direct negotiations could no longer be assumed. This was manifest in the November 1968 Rusk proposal for an Egyptian-Israel settlement. It evoked little public reaction at the time only because it was confidential and because it was rejected by the Egyptians out of hand.

The conditions operating to move the Johnson Administration off center in its waning days were essentially those that induced the incoming Nixon Administration to take a new policy direction. The disaster of June 1967 had not brought the Arabs around; the year-long mediation efforts of Gunnar Jarring had been fruitless; the Russians had replaced all the Arabs' material losses and more; the fedayeen were becoming an important force on their own; most importantly, the cease-fire lines had become intermittent-fire lines with the ever-present threat that the cycle of attack and reprisal would escalate into a full-fledged war into which the superpowers might be sucked willy-nilly. Seeing, as well, an increasing danger to U.S. relations with its remaining friends in the Arab world -- the conservative monarchies and Lebanon -- the Nixon Administration turned to big power negotiations to work out a settlement before it was too late. In entering the talks, Washington was aware of the dangers of failure and estimated only limited probabilities of success, but it counted on a presumptive Soviet interest in preventing a fourth round in the Middle East. Above all, the Administration felt that the costs of continued inaction outweighed those of the new direction.

From the very beginning, Israel made no secret of its absolute opposition to the big power talks. The talks were not being conducted on how to get the parties to the conference table where they would

themselves settle their dispute, but on what piece of paper to put before them. By definition, the big power talks were a rejection of the principle of direct negotiation of all elements of a peace agreement. Washington maintained that the talks were intended only to establish a basis for negotiations, and it continued to recognize the importance of a contractual agreement arrived at directly between the parties. However, Israel came increasingly to believe that the Americans no longer held a comm'tment to the principle of a directly negotiated peace, only to the need for some kind of settlement soon.

There was a fundamental disagreement between Washington and Jerusalem centering on the validity of the half-loaf analogy. The Rogers Plan did not call for de jure recognition of Israel but recognition of its "sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, and right to live in peace". Securing Arab agreement to this formula was viewed in the State Department as a formidable but not impossible job, provided Israel made the appropriate concessions. An arrangement based on this formula could be a durable settlement which would ultimately be transformed into normal state-to-state relations. On the other hand, formal recognition was out of the question and if that was the price of a settlement, none would be obtained. But to Jerusalem, which continued to regard the Arab-Israel conflict as a confrontation over Israel's right to exist, substantive concessions made sense only in response to a demonstrable reversal of Arab attitudes. Only when the Arabs agreed to face Israel across a bargaining table would it be clear that they were at last prepared to live in peace with the Jewish state.

The principle of negotiation was the first casualty of the Four Power talks, declared Mrs. Meir to the Knesset in December 1969. In the Israeli view there were bound to be others, for the U.S. role in the talks was anomalous. Hoping to play the part of evenhanded go-between, Washington found itself instead in the uncomfortable role of pleader of Israel's cause to balance unambiguous Soviet partisanship. As the Arab pressures on the United States to change policy mounted,

it was only natural that the United States would try to escape being tarred with the brush of pro-Israelism by adopting a policy consciously different from Israel's.

There was a dilemma in the American approach to a Middle East settlement that had not escaped Soviet observation. On one hand, there is a strand in U.S. thinking that harks back to the pre-Six Day War support for the "territorial integrity of all states in the region". This is the principle recorded in the Security Council Resolution of November 1967 "emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war". On the other hand, there was a residual support of the strategy of no withdrawal without peace and of the Israeli demand for secure and recognized borders, although the position had been impaired by a somewhat more elastic view of the requirements of "peace" and the definition of "security". Hence, the Soviet accusation that the United States wished "to turn the unconditional demand for the evacuation of the occupied Arab lands into a subject for barter" was disconcerting. The tension of operating under that dilemma was an additional eroding force.

As it viewed the U.S. alarm over the consequences of close identification with Israel and the "explosive" situation on the cease-fire lines, Jerusalem grimly speculated on the approaching showdown with its sponsor, on the likelihood that Washington would cut Israel off to face the Soviets and the Arabs unaided. Fear of abandonment by the United States was a recurrent nightmare of the Israeli political imagination. Even when American support was least stinting, there was an underlying uneasiness that the foundations of that support were built on sand. Jerusalem had often attempted to convince Washington that Israel was the most effective counter to Soviet penetration, but the State Department was only partly impressed and far more concerned about the danger to U.S. interests in Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf. Israel had lived for two decades with the conviction that it was an unwanted child, that the optimum solution to the Arab-Israel conflict from the State Department's point of view was the sudden

and quiet disappearance of the Jewish state from the Middle East map. Israelis argued that the radicalization of the Arab world, which was accompanied by the progressive diminution of U.S. presence and influence in the region, was historically inevitable and only tangentially related to the Arab-Israel conflict. But they were not able to convince their listeners. Since no one had yet thought up a compelling rationale for the strategic necessity of American alliance with Israel, there was a nagging fear that some day, to defend interests perceived as vital, the United States would be ready to sell Israel down the Persian Gulf.

Notes of strident tension in U.S.-Israel relations were not confined to 1969 and 1970. After the breakdown of the Jarring talks in February 1971 brought about by Israel's refusal to commit itself to complete withdrawal in advance of negotiations with the Arabs, Washington began an active effort to bring Israel and Egypt together in an interim agreement that would reopen the Suez Canal and move Israeli troops back into Sinai.[1] These discussions were marked by a number of acrimonious exchanges, particularly during Secretary Rogers' visit to Israel in May 1971. As late as December 1971, Mrs. Meir felt it necessary to journey to Washington for a personal meeting with President Nixon to clear the atmosphere.

The atmospheric change in 1972 was indeed surprising. Imposition of a settlement on Israel now seemed to be the furthest thing from Washington's mind. Both sides chose to ignore past unpleasantness and the 1969 Rogers Plan was treated with the delicacy reserved for

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[1] The implicit abandonment of the principle of "no withdrawal without peace" was Israel-initiated. It was Dayan who broached the notion first before it was taken up in Cairo and Washington.

the peccadillos of a family black sheep newly restored to grace.[1] Now, military and political support of Israel was the order of the day. The then Israeli Ambassador in Washington, Yitzhak Rabin, extolled the Republican Administration in terms that aroused a flurry of controversy in the United States: "I do not recall that any previous U.S. President undertook commitments as President Nixon did during his speech to the joint meeting of the two Houses of Congress after the Moscow talks, when he said: 'I reemphasized to the Russians the American people's commitment to safeguard the existence of the State of Israel'".[2]

If in mid-1972 relations between the United States and Israel were at a level that evoked enthusiastic political support for the Administration from the Israeli Embassy in Washington, was it not due in part to Israel's intransigence, Jerusalem wondered aloud? Twice in President Nixon's first term the U.S. government withheld sales of advanced jet aircraft to Israel -- during the spring and summer of 1970 and again in the latter half of 1971. Neither episode brought any perceptible softening of the Israeli stand[3] (or any apparent diminution in the scale of Soviet involvement and in the flow of Soviet weaponry to the region). Lurking in the background of any possible U.S. calculation of the leverage that could be exerted on Israel by granting or withholding arms was the specter of Israeli nuclear potential.

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[1] Cf. the following comments by Yosef Harif, an Israeli journalist known for the accuracy of his reports of supposedly confidential cabinet proceedings: "Everybody in Washington knows that [the Rogers Plan] is dead, although no one is thinking, in the expression of a senior American official, of arranging a 'public requiem'. A White House figure was prepared to say only this: The Rogers Plan is history. We are not annulling it; we are not confirming it. It certainly does not obligate the United States, with respect to either the USSR or Egypt, on the question of borders. He also said: if they will come now and say, we now agree to what we rejected before, we will tell them -- now [the Rogers Plan] doesn't obligate us. The principle is that the borders must be determined in negotiations between the sides" (emphasis in original). Maariv, December 15, 1972.

[2] In an interview on Israeli radio, June 10, 1972.

[3] The Cabinet's decision in July 1970 to agree to withdrawal in some form, an action which brought about the resignation of the right-wing Gahal ministers, was surely motivated by the desire for a cease-fire rather than the hope for American arms.

It did not seem possible to pressure Israel by withholding arms, at least not without incurring high political costs.

Perhaps most important, the effort seemed unnecessary. The twin specters that had exercised Washington's imagination and had driven the State Department to intensive bouts of diplomatic effort, superpower confrontation and polarization, were seemingly exorcised. Negotiations with Moscow had revealed that the Kremlin's fear of confrontation, contrary to the original expectation of the Nixon administration, was considerably weaker than the concern for the maintenance of the Soviet position in the Arab world. Washington's own fears of the consequences of another round of Arab-Israeli war were attenuated as the cease-fire on the Canal held and Cairo demonstrated its unwillingness to resume the battle. The crushing defeat of the fedayeen in Jordan had removed the threat to Hussein's throne and paralyzed the radicalizing force of militant Palestinian nationalism. Thus, even the massive responses of the IDF to periodic flareups of terrorist activity along the Lebanese and Syrian borders failed to evoke significant U.S. reactions. Nor did declarations such as that of the IDF's chief of staff, General Elazar, that Israel's desire to preserve the cease-fire was "no stronger than our desire and our iron determination to fight the saboteurs. Therefore, our desire to keep the cease-fire cannot deter us from operations against the saboteurs even if these operations endanger the cease-fire".[1]

Heykal noted with some bitterness that support of Israel had not harmed U.S. trade interests in the Middle East: U.S. exports to the Arab world had continued to increase, from $275 million in the first quarter of 1971 to $307 million in the first quarter of 1972.[2] As for the escalating demands of oil producers, through most of 1972 they seemed to reflect a dynamic of their own, only tangentially related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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[1] Maariv, November 3, 1972.

[2] Heykal, in al-Ahram, June 23, 1972, citing U.S. Department of Commerce figures.

This is not to say that the United States and Israel reached complete accord in 1972 and certainly not on Israel's terms. Mrs. Meir was undoubtedly aware that whether the 1969 Rogers Plan was alive or dead, in a renewed military crisis, Washington would still be attempting to distinguish between support for Israel's territorial conquests and commitment to its national existence. Ambassador Rabin followed his praise of President Nixon on the radio interview cited earlier with a grim caution: "On the other hand, I repeat that the lesson we learned on the eve of the Six Day War should be imprinted in our minds and should remind us that when the die is cast and we face the test, we find ourselves alone, face to face with our fate."

When the die was cast on October 6, 1973, Israel found itself almost alone. Its political isolation was virtually complete, but large arms shipments from the United States contributed to the Israeli recovery from initial setbacks and helped keep the scale of casualties from reaching disastrous proportions. Washington's actions in the Yom Kippur War clearly reemphasized the Nixon Administration's policy distinction between defending Israel's conquests and preserving Israel's existence.

It was an event that even the pessimists in Israel failed to foresee that revived the strains in U.S.-Israel relations and may have been responsible for the outbreak of war itself. This was the linking of the Arab-Israeli conflict to the power struggle between the Middle Eastern oil countries and the major industrial consumers. Cairo overcame its inhibitions about attempting to cross the Canal in force without direct Soviet involvement only after becoming convinced that there was no other way of breaking the stalemate except by making concessions that were still deemed too costly. But perhaps this was only the necessary condition and the sufficient one was the possibility of putting into play the "oil weapon", to force the Nixon administration to apply effective pressure on Israel. Were the military action and oil pressure inseparably linked in Cairo's view? On the eve of the war,

a major Egyptian journalist seemed to hint at impending linkage: "We cannot expect anything from U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in regard to the crisis, without exerting pressure. Fruitful pressure cannot be confined to the oil pressure. We need to raise the level of pressure through action to end the deadlock."[1]

The long-sought opportunity to wield the "oil weapon" arrived only in 1973, as King Faisal of Saudi Arabia abandoned his long-standing insistence that oil and Arab-Israeli politics did not mix. Faisal's reversal of position came about as Saudi oil revenues, swollen by the combination of escalating prices and the sharp increases in Aramco's scale of production, outdistanced the Saudi capacity to consume or invest. With world demand for oil promising to be brisk into the '80s and '90s and the international monetary system in near-constant crisis, it became clear that oil in the ground was worth more than money in the bank. For the first time, Faisal could afford to become an active participant in the Arab "battle of destiny". Interruptions of supply, used as a weapon to pressure the supporters of Israel, would cost him nothing; with the world hungry for oil, the action would even add to his coffers.

So the conjuncture of events was favorable for joint Arab political-military action. Whether or not this included Saudi involvement in the strategic planning of the war,[2] the exacerbation of the energy crisis by the Arab embargo and production cutback, coupled with

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[1] Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, (chief editor of) Akhbar al-Yawm, September 29, 1973.

[2] For an assertion of Saudi involvement, see Juan de Orris in New York Times, November 10, 1973, p. 12. An alternative view, that Sadat went to war in part to avoid becoming Faisal's compliant tool, is presented in the Neue Zuricher Zeitung, October 12, 1973. After the fact, an Egyptian journalist appeared to argue that an Israeli military defeat was necessary for the oil weapon to be credible: "Who guards the oil, the Arabs or Israel? If the oil remained just a raw material in shaky hands, then the second premise would be the correct one -- namely that Israel can defeat the Arabs and guard the oil. This is why the use of the oil weapon had to be concomitant with the fighting. The October War was necessary for the oil weapon to have a meaning." (Saha ad-Din, in al-Ahram, November 3, 1973.)

the results on the battlefield, seemed to move the Nixon Administration to energetic action in directions that Arabs found more favorable to their interests than did Israelis. His call for a cease fire on October 7, Kissinger is said to have assured Heykal, was expected "to be in [the Arab] interest before it could be in Israel's interest."[1] Nor was his second proposal several days later for a cease fire in place received with greater pleasure in Jerusalem. The White House decided to counter the Soviet airlift with one to Israel only after several days of hopeful waiting for the Soviet flow to taper off and then only for fear that serious weakening of the IDF might tempt its opponents to play for higher stakes than recovery of a piece of the Sinai desert.[2]

Jerusalem was effusively grateful for the literally life-saving supplies, but the volume of cargo delivered to Israel in the month following the war was reported as only a tenth as large as that obtained by Syria and Egypt from the USSR in the same period.[3] The limited nature of the U.S. backing was demonstrated anew when Kissinger hastily flew to Moscow, within hours of a Brezhnev invitation, to work out a cease fire that was intended to avert another disastrous defeat of Arab arms. As for the U.S. military alert on October 25, the alarm was occasioned by the prospect of Soviet forces attacking the Israeli army on the cease-fire line. Had the Kremlin actually dispatched troops but explicitly with the purpose of protecting Cairo or Damascus, it is doubtful that the U.S. reaction would have exceeded verbal protests.

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[1] Al-Ahram, November 16, 1973.

[2] According to Heykal (ibid.), Kissinger justified the U.S. aid to Israel as follows: "You can of course imagine the internal pressure we came under to help Israel. When we could not cope with the internal pressure through a Security Council decision to cease firing, we began to help Israel."

[3] Drew Middleton, in the New York Times, November 28, 1973.

Both Washington and Jerusalem denied that pressure was being exerted on Israel, but as the peace conference was prepared, it was made clear to the Israelis that they were expected to agree to hand back virtually all of the territory occupied in 1967, in return for which Washington might provide a unilateral or joint U.S.-Soviet guarantee. Perhaps the United States could cope with the Arab oil embargo, but, according to James Reston, Kissinger warned the Israelis that "the United States is not prepared to risk war with the Soviet Union every time there is an Arab-Israeli conflict, unless there is a clear violation of some internationally guaranteed agreement."[1]

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[1] New York Times, December 9, 1973, Section 4.

V. THE AFTERMATH OF THE OCTOBER WAR

A crisis in international relations casts a powerful light on events of the time. As Laqueur has written, "all the quasi-problems suddenly disappear and...perception of the issues is sharpened. ... [a crisis] clears away the cobwebs of wishful thinking, of irrelevant theories and spurious explanations." However, he warns, "the danger of distortion is greatest at a time of crisis;...events which loom very large at the moment of writing may appear in a different perspective a few years later."[1]

The caution is well-taken. The analyst of current events has a natural tendency to project the trends of the recent past, a tendency that receives academic legitimation from contemporary theories of bureaucratic politics that emphasize the inertia of large organizations. In the wake of a crisis it is even more difficult to contemplate alternatives to the course emerging from the immediate experience. Nevertheless, we must beware, as Laqueur enjoins us, of "the cunning of reason: a great triumph may be the prelude to disaster and a defeat may eventually turn into victory."[2] The following comments on relations of the powers with their clients and on the state of detente in the Middle East attempt to keep that injunction in mind.

June 1967 was a defeat for Soviet policy and Soviet-supplied arms but was followed by the appearance in Egypt and Syria of the largest Soviet military presence outside the communist area and since the Bolshevik Revolution. Two years later the wheel turned full circle: the expulsion of the Soviet military from Egypt in July 1972 seemed to mark a dramatic break in the long line of the USSR's advance into the Middle East. Little more than a year later, Moscow was heavily involved again in aiding the military efforts of its major clients and in defending their political interests in various international forums.

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[1] Walter Laqueur, The Struggle for the Middle East, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 17.

[2] Ibid.

Soviet fortunes have risen and fallen at various times since the USSR reappeared on the Middle East scene in the middle 1950s, but the net result up to the present time is surely unmistakable. During the first two decades after the Second World War, the Soviet Union was unable to secure acceptance of its claim that the Middle East was a legitimate sphere of Soviet interest. Indeed, after the creation of the State of Israel, Moscow generally withdrew from involvement in the region until after Stalin's death. However, in the dozen years after the Egyptian-Czech arms agreement, Moscow gained and expanded a bridgehead in the Arab world and helped trigger (but also control the spread of) the Six Day War. That brief interval brought the Soviet Union the historic achievement of recognition as one of the two arbiters of the region's destiny. Thus, in his address at the UN's 25th anniversary session on October 23, 1970, President Nixon acknowledged that "the Middle East is the place today...where the vital interests of the United States and the Soviet Union are both involved."[1] It is the United States and the USSR that are the effective cosponsors of the post-October peace negotiations.

During a quarter century of strife in the Middle East, the United States had failed to prevent the penetration of the region by the Soviet Union or to secure its "rollback". One may point to a variety of particular factors in operation, including both U.S. errors and Soviet skill, but containment failed in the Middle East basically because the process depends on the existence of a strong will to resist on the part of the local states. In the Middle East, in sharp contrast to Western Europe, that will did not exist. On the contrary, the Soviet Union found a significant confluence of its own interests with those of the radical elites that came to power in a number of Middle Eastern countries. In the period since the Six Day War, Washington found that it was impossible to secure the agreement of the Soviet Union to a broad-based settlement of the local conflict, because the dynamics of the situation seemed to Moscow to promise the expulsion of the United States from the region entirely.

As Soviet involvement intensified, in 1969-1970, there were some who regarded the fundamental problem of the Middle Eastern crisis as one of

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[1] New York Times, October 24, 1970.

assuring the Soviet Union a legitimate place in the Middle East. There were others who wondered whether the Soviet Union could possibly be persuaded to legitimate the U.S. position in the Middle East. But the United States has not prevented Soviet penetration in the Middle East; it could not "expel" the Soviet Union from the Middle East: it could not offer Moscow "a place" in the Middle East. Washington could either accede to Soviet penetration or try to contain its limits.

Nevertheless, the Soviet position proved vulnerable. This writer's mid-1970 consideration of Soviet policy alternatives in the Middle East suggested the importance of the level of Soviet control over the policy of its major client in determining the outcome of Moscow's confrontation with high-risk, high-cost policy options.[1] The paper concluded with the observation that "increasing Soviet involvement without sufficient control could generate tensions that might be resolved at the extremes of the spectrum, either less involvement or high-control greater involvement."[2] Evidently, at the crunch-point in July 1972, Moscow's control in Egypt proved inadequate and Soviet forces withdrew without a struggle. The Kremlin would undoubtedly prefer to get back into Egypt on terms that assured much greater Soviet control, but that may prove impossible to obtain. Presumably this will reinforce Moscow's inclination to limit its commitments carefully.

If the USSR's position in Egypt today is less than perfectly assured, it reflects a Soviet failure to steer the evolution of the state and society in a consistently "progressive" direction. Old illusions about the pliability of the military revolutionaries have been dispelled . In a prophetic passage penned in 1968, Georgii Mirskii, the Soviet specialist on the role of the military in underdeveloped countries, declared:

> The conception of the consistently progressive role of the army in Asia and Africa has turned out to be nothing more than an illusion. As the example of the Egyptian

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[1] A. S. Becker, "Future Policy Alternatives (pp. 605-636) of A. S. Becker and A. L. Horelick, "Soviet Policy in the Middle East," in Hammond and Alexander, eds., Political Dynamics in the Middle East.

[2] Ibid., p. 636.

> revolution has shown, the army is capable of playing a progressive role at the stage of the liquidation of feudal rule as well as in the initial period of social transformation. But in the stage of profound social revolution, the army usually manifests conservative tendencies.[1]

Mirskii's reference to Egypt was to the officer class and the debacle of 1967. He regarded Nasser himself as one of the outstanding examples of the small group of "revolutionary democrats with epaulettes" — the only category of third world military leaders Mirskii considered "progressive."[2] But Nasser, the conspicuous exception, was gone, and Sadat turned out to be just another petit-bourgeois pragmatist.

Soviet wariness towards Sadat must be strengthened by the recent development of a Saudi-Egyptian common front. Relations between Moscow and Riyadh are now unusually smooth -- for the first time, Feisal congratulated the USSR on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviets responded with appreciation[3] -- but the increasingly assertive Saudi voice is still a conservative one that must be hostile to an expanding Soviet role in both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf.

It is Sadat, moreover, who chose to renew relations with the United States precisely on November 7, the anniversary of the Revolution. According to Heykal, Kissinger expressed his appreciation of the contrast between Egyptian actions after the October War and those after the June War: "In 1967 you stirred up the world against us...President as-Sadat acted more calmly in 1973...you have opened the door for us to play a role we have the desire to perform and feel we can perform."[4]

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[1] Mirskii, "O kharaktere sotsial'nykh sil v Azii i Afrike", Kommunist, No. 17, 1968, p. 96.

[2] Mirskii, Armiia i politika v stranakh Azii i Afriki, Nauka, 1970, p. 304.

[3] As an example, on Radio Moscow in Arabic, November 13, 1973.

[4] Al-Ahram, November 16, 1973.

But if the U.S. chose to walk through that door, it was in part because of the long-term pressure exerted by the USSR. The understanding expressed for the Arab position, the readiness to work for a settlement that requires near-total Israeli withdrawal, came about because of the October War and its oil embargo aftermath. Moscow had little hand in the latter but had a clearly major role in the former. Heykal accuses Kissinger of holding "the realities of power" foremost in his crisis calculations and fears that "if Israel is able to change the conditions of power in the field, we could find ourselves required to accept these new conditions as a new basis." To Heykal this underscores the importance of the global balance of power and hence of the Soviet role in the Middle East. "This role should not be secondary or a temporary element, but should be confirmed through deep Soviet-Arab understanding and long-lasting friendship."[1] Cairo may recognize that only the United States can secure Israeli withdrawal, but it will probably also continue to appreciate that only the Soviet Union can keep the United States interested in securing that withdrawal.

There is then reason to suppose that the USSR will retain an important position in Egypt, failing a basic resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In recent years Moscow has shown increasing interest in Persian Gulf affairs as well, developing a close and special relationship with Iraq. This development and the centrality of South Asia in Soviet designs for the containment of China place Soviet interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in altered perspective. Calvocoressi has observed that the in-betweenness of the Middle East was its salient characteristic for British policy in the imperial era. The Middle East was important because Europe's trade with the East was important, and the Middle East was the passageway from the English Channel to the Indian Ocean.[2] As Calvocoressi also noted, the region serves a similar function for the Soviet Union.[3] The significance of this role of the

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Peter Calvocoressi, "Britain and the Middle East", in Hammond and Alexander, eds., Political Dynamics in the Middle East, pp. 425-426.

[3] Ibid., p. 439.

Middle East in Soviet policy would increase considerably as Soviet interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean matured. This would also be the result of a redirection of emphasis away from Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, but at an evident cost.

With the death of Nasser, Moscow lost an important fulcrum of its leverage in the Arab and in much of the underdeveloped world too. Egypt could be expected to continue to play a major role in inter-Arab affairs, by virtue of its size and Soviet-supplied power, but that role would be unlikely to serve Soviet interests nearly as well as in the past. Egypt's future strategic value could be seen from Moscow as having two components: one related to countering the U.S. power in the Mediterranean, an aspect already discussed at length, but the other was connected to Egypt's command of the artery linking the Mediterranean and the Arabian Sea.

For several years, Moscow was content to leave this bright promise unwrapped on the shelf. Soviet leaders were not sufficiently concerned about the continued closure of the Canal to be willing to join Cairo in an attempt to push the Israelis out of the Bar-Lev line. As one consequence of the October War, the exploitation of that opportunity may be at hand, if an agreement fo at least partial Israeli withdrawal in the Sinai can be negotiated.

In the waning days of 1973, the conditions for settlement, and perhaps the basic objectives as well, of Arabs and Israelis, seem as difficult to reconcile as ever before. As long as Israel remains in control of large sections of pre-Six-Day-War Arab territory, each cease-fire must be viewed with foreboding in Arab capitals. Well before the October War it had been a widespread view in Cairo that Egypt's only hope was in Heykal's words, to "set ablaze a region in which the world will not allow any fire." Heykal assumed then, as perhaps the October War reinforced the belief among others, that "even fire has different degrees of temperature which can be precisely and expertly controlled."[1] In December 1973, the third post-Six-Day-War cease-fire was formally

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[1] Al-Ahram, June 23, 1972.

holding but artillery on both fronts was active daily. A new flareup of October dimensions seemed far from improbable.

Concerned to head off a fifth round of the Arab-Israeli War, Washington has publicly recognized the reality of both Arab frustration with the status-quo-ante October and Israel's fears for its security within shrunken borders. However, the mechanism to bridge the gap between the two realities, international guarantees, has never aroused Israeli enthusiasm and is less likely to do so now than ever before. True, Israel's political isolation is almost complete and only the U.S. remains a friend among the powers. But while the U.S. is indeed Israel's best and only significant friend, their interests often diverge. A major case in point is oil, and a renewed Arab embargo in the future might find the United States more heavily dependent on external sources and therefore more reluctant tc bear the costs of maintaining its support for Israel.

Other reasons for Israeli skepticism are also apparent. With the best will in the world, the credibility of an American guarantee has been tarnished by domestic upheavals. Part of the problem is obviously a legacy of the Vietnam involvement, but the "no-more-Vietnams" syndrome only strengthens Israeli doubts on the likelihood of immediate U.S. response if ever Jerusalem invoked the promise of assistance. Even if it were forthcoming, the effectiveness of a U.S. response to an ally thousands of miles away and with no strategic depth can be legitimately questioned.

There has always been a tension in U.S.-Israeli relations caused by Washington's sense of frustration that it has incurred the onus of identification with Israel without the compensating advantage of influencing major policy decisions in Jerusalem. For its part, the latter feels constrained to resist U.S. pressure as long as American action in Israel's behalf is improvised and scenario-dependent rather than defined in a long-term alliance framework. The likelihood of such an overt U.S.-Israel alliance is poor, viewed from Jerusalem, largely for the reasons already indicated, but also because the probability of the United States enduring in easy alliance with any one else is also poor. Observing the rocky course of U.S.-West European

relations, a thoughtful Israeli might consider the Europeans fortunate that no significant present danger threatens to test the solidity of Atlantic ties. Even so, the Europeans seem headed for the organization of their own, European-based, common nuclear defense.

Jerusalem maintains that much of the anguish in its relations with the United States is unnecessary because there is a bedrock mutuality of interest between them. Israelis see U.S. deterrence of direct Soviet intervention, solid military-political support of Israel, and avoidance of confrontation with the USSR as intimately linked. By keeping Soviet forces out of the Arab-Israeli conflict and keeping Israel strong, Washington avoids the necessity of intervening itself. By the same set of actions, Washington also convinces the major Arab states that only the United States holds the key to satisfying their minimum requirements. Thereby it gains room for maneuver without incurring the risks of intervention. In Israeli eyes, it was not so surprising that after the largest U.S. military supply effort to Israel, a U.S. Secretary of State was warmly received in Cairo, more so than on almost any previous occasion.[1]

But in Washington it is believed that Kissinger's welcome in Cairo was made possible by the demonstration of a U.S. commitment to move energetically toward a settlement. Preservation of that momentum, the Administration feels sure, is the price of continued Egyptian confidence. If the U.S. holds the key to satisfying minimum Arab demands, it can only be by its capacity to secure Israeli withdrawal. And so the circle is joined once more. It will require great dexterity to balance Arab demands, Israeli fears, and the world hunger for oil, without yet another ritual of bloodletting.

The American balancing act also attempts to keep the Soviet-American detente from crashing to the ground. There were differences of opinion in the western world whether this already occurred in October 1973. Certainly, those who thought as Douglas-Hume, that "detente is or ought to be the essence of good neighborliness," found Soviet

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[1] See the interview with Yitzhak Rabin, in Al Hamishmar, November 16, 1973.

behavior in the first weeks of October disconcerting. On the eve of the 1972 Moscow summit meetings, Henry Kissinger ventured the opinion that "we are on the verge not just of success in this or that negotiation, but of what could be a new relationship of benefit to all mankind."[1] After the meetings, Kissinger suggested that the declaration on Basic Principles of Mutual Relations, signed as the capstone of the week's encounters, might signal the end of the race for petty advantage over the other superpower. A world in which such competition continued to be pursued could be too dangerous to live in.[2] The following year, when Brezhnev came to Washington, the sides solemnly agreed "that they will act in such a manner as to prevent the development of situations capable of causing a dangerous exacerbation of their relations."[3]

Moscow surely knew of the imminence of war in late September and early October but did nothing to forestall the Egyptian-Syrian attack or to alert Washington. When the war came, the Kremlin fanned the flames instead of seeking to damp the fire down -- refusing to cooperate in seeking a cease fire, urging other Arab states to join the battle, and strengthening its client's forces in the midst of the fighting.[4] It did not seem "neighborly" to threaten or hint at unilateral intervention and to engage in alarming maneuvers, such as concentrating airborne forces or appear to be dispatching nuclear

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[1] Newsweek, May 29, 1972, p. 35.

[2] At a newsconference in Kiev on May 29: Department of State Bulletin, 66:1722, June 26, 1972, p. 893.

[3] "Agreement on Prevention of Nuclear War Signed June 22", Department of State, The Washington Summit: General Secretary Brezhnev's Visit to the United States, June 18-25, 1973, August 1973, p. 30.

[4] A considerable amount of energy was expended in the U.S. during the first week of the war debating whether the Soviet airlift was "massive" and if so whether it was "massive enough" to shake the structure of detente.

materials aboard Soviet ships to Egyptian ports.[1] Communication between the superpowers seemed to consist as much of cold-war techniques -- threats, troop movements, alerts -- as of the tools of an era of negotiation. Many believed that the Kremlin had chosen consciously to sacrifice detente for the sake of the gains it believed could be made by exploiting a tempting opportunity in the Middle East.

Washington denied that it had been duped or that detente had crumbled. Instead, it claimed that the existence of detente prevented the transformation of a mini-crisis into a disastrous superpower conflict. The issue, said Kissinger, was not just that a confrontation had taken place (on October 24-25): "But also one has to consider how rapidly the confrontation was ended and how quickly the two sides have attempted to move back to a policy of cooperation in settling the Middle East conflict."[2] Moscow fully agreed: "The consequences of the military flareup in the Middle East would undoubtedly have been much more dangerous if the international climate had not thawed and the positive changes in Soviet-U.S. relations had not occurred."[3]

However, the Kremlin saw no contradiction between that defense of the viability of detente and the Soviet role in the Middle East conflict. To the Arabs, Moscow asserted that its stand in October 1973 "completely refutes the main theme of the enemies of Soviet-Arab friendship and cooperation, which says that the detente between the Soviet Union with the United States and other western capitals and countries can affect the Soviet commitments towards its friends and allies. The Soviet Union's speedy and decisive support for the two victims of aggression, Egypt and Syria, dispelled and wiped out this myth."[4]

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[1] New York Times, November 22, 1973.

[2] New York Times, November 22, 1973, press conference transcript.

[3] P. Demchenko, in Pravda, November 11, 1973. See also Kosygin's speech in Minsk, in Sovetskaia Belorussiia, November 15, 1973.

[4] Radio Moscow in Arabic, October 30, 1973.

Soviet support of the other blade of the October scissors, the oil embargo and production cutbacks, was no less solid. Viewing the scramble by western Europe and Japan to issue pro-Soviet statements as the oil pressure increased, Moscow assured the Arab world: "These facts tangibly prove that Arab countries, if unified in their efforts and mobilized in their resources, including the oil weapon, could tighten the noose of international isolation around the neck of the aggressor with greater vigor."[1] Using a standard technique of citing non-Soviet sources in support of a drastic move, Moscow echoed Arab calls to nationalize American property without compensation.[2] It was suggested that "were the Arab countries to withdraw [only half of their holdings [of foreign exchange in European banks], this would seriously shake the finances of many West European countries."[3]

The war and the exploitation of the "oil weapon" provided the USSR with the opportunity to play on a variety of its propoganda themes, including that of the dangers and weaknesses of the NATO alliance. Italians were warned that their country could have been dragged into war as a result of the extension of the U.S. alert to American forces in Italy: "Thus, the presence of foreign armed forces on Italian soil has again shown, this time in relation to the Middle East crisis, the serious danger to the country's sovereignty entailed by Italy's membership in NATO."[4] The European states' frantic efforts to assure national supplies of oil and gas evoked the sarcastic comment that "Atlantic solidarity, particularly when it is a question of economic interests, is an entirely ephemeral thing. The oil crisis has shown once more the worth of talk of the 'community of interests' of the western world."[5]

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[1] Radio Moscow in Arabic, November 5, 1973.

[2] Radio Peace and Progress in English to Africa, November 5, 1973.

[3] R. Andreasyan, "Middle East: The Oil Factor," New Times, No. 45-46, November 1973, p. 18.

[4] Radio Moscow in Italian, November 15, 1973.

[5] I. Danov, in Sotsialisticheskaia industriia, November 13, 1973.

The Middle East war of October 1973 did not shatter the Soviet-American detente, because detente is not in fact "the essence of good neighborliness." Detente may be a misnomer for the pattern of superpower relations, but whatever name one may choose, the conflict proved the essential stability of that pattern. Kissinger has been at pains to stress that detente did not mean ideological convergence, a theme which is obviously even more prominent in Soviet apologias for detente. Both sides agree that detente is a condition made inescapable by the nuclear balance of terror. Most likely the members of the Politburo would agree with the American Secretary of State that the two sides have "a unique relationship." They might also agree with his explication: "We are at one and the same time adversaries and partners in the preservation of peace."[1]

But while the adversary relation is "natural" and almost instinctive, the partnership is wary and derives from the adversaryship itself. It is only because congenital antagonists hold the threat of annihilation over each other's heads that they are led to cooperate in maintaining the peace. Even so, peaceful accommodation is not the sole Soviet method of crisis management. This paper has attempted to describe a pattern of Soviet behavior in the Middle East that has been characterized by both aggressiveness and circumspection, depending on the circumstances and the perception by both powers of the size of the stakes. The October War provides ample evidence of the continuation of these behavioral propensities.

"The relationship that has developed between the Soviet Union and the United States since 1971," Kissinger suggested after the war, "has been one of considerable restraint."[2] This is a description of the glass half-full. At best such restraint defines a limited adversary relation, not a partnership. The Kremlin's public reaffirmations of the necessity for peaceful coexistence reflect no abandonment of the intention to pursue Soviet gains in power competition with the United States. Moscow and Washington became partners in containing the October conflagration only because the U.S. government resolved to

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[1] New York Times, October 26, 1973.

[2] New York Times, November 22, 1973.

prevent another smashing Israeli victory and Arab defeat. Had the military situation continued to move in the Arabs' favor two weeks after D-day as it did then, the government of the USSR would have seen no reason to stop the fighting. Although Kissinger argued that the crisis of October 24-25 ended quickly because both sides recognized their long term interests, it was an adversary response that kept the peace that day -- U.S. response to the threat of Soviet intervention and the Soviet fear of military confrontation. It is not yet clear that Soviet-American partnership will succeed in bringing a durable settlement to the Middle East.